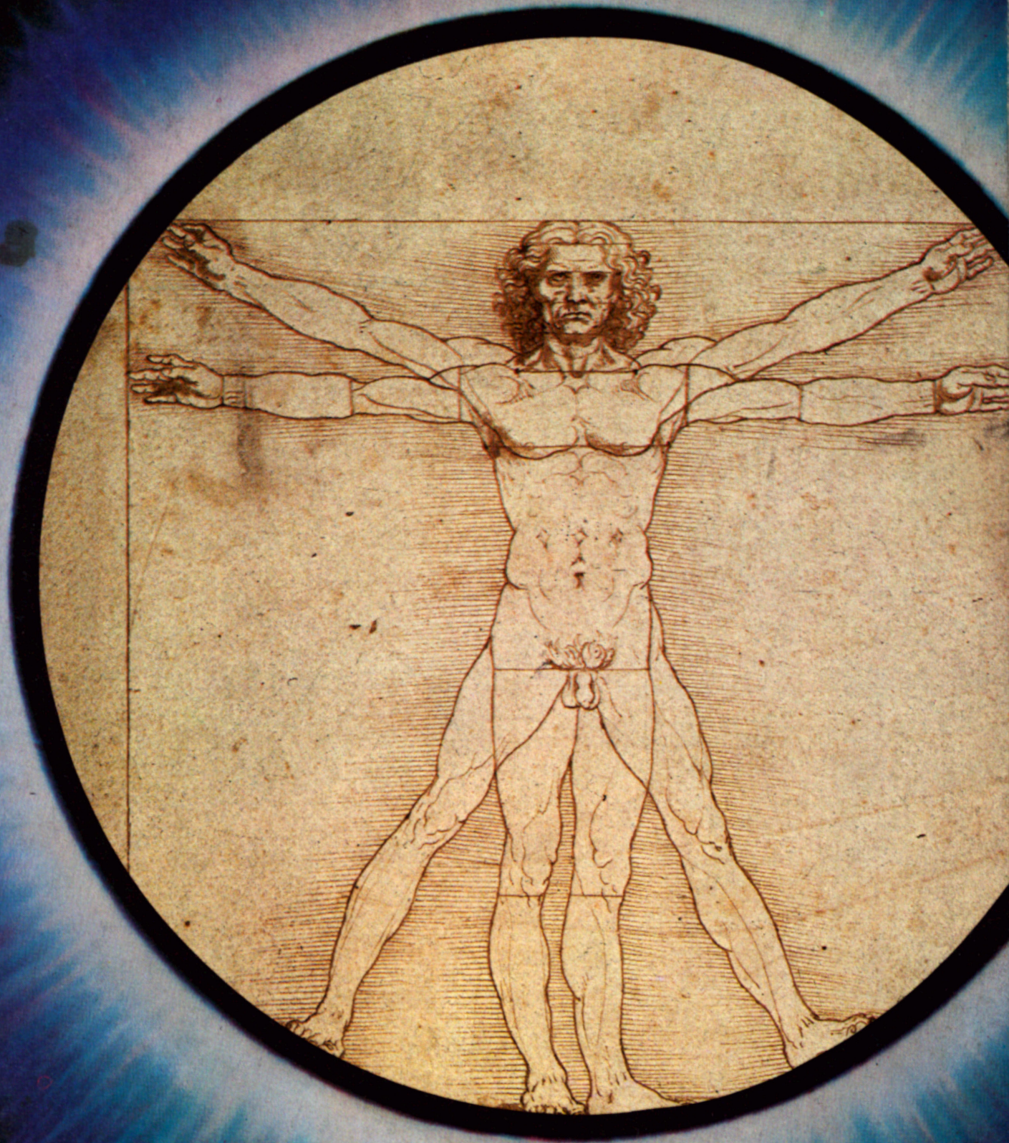
65p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

152

Sacred geometry
Swedenborg's strange world
Edgar Allan Poe: murderer?
An answer to Livingston?
Roy - king of deceit



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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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Contents

Sacred geometry
A SENSE OF PROPORTION 3021
We look at the ancient world's fascination with the idea of perfect harmony as expressed in their buildings
Spelman Timmins

Livingston
LIVINGSTON: THE VERDICT 3026
Did a UFO-guided robot really attack a Scottish forester? Or was there another, almost equally bizarre, explanation?
Steuart Campbell

William Roy
KING OF DECEIT 3029
We investigate the secrets of 'medium' William Roy who, even when he confessed to fraud, still drew the crowds
Melvin Harris

Edgar Allan Poe
WAS POE A MURDERER? 3033
There is some evidence that Poe, the master of horror fiction, may have been involved in a real murder
Graham Fuller and Ian Knight

Swedenborg
'THE UNACCOUNTABLE ONE' 3038
The great Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg regularly carried messages from the living to the dead
David Christie-Murray

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A sense of proportion

From time immemorial sacred buildings have been designed to be tangible expressions of Man's intangible beliefs. SPELMAN TIMMINS explores the tradition of building in harmony with natural and cosmic laws

MORE THAN 2000 YEARS ago, during the lifetime of the Greek philosopher Plato (*c.* 427–347 BC), the people of Delos were struck down by a terrible pestilence. In despair, they consulted the oracle, and asked what steps they should take to rid themselves of this scourge. The oracle set them a problem to solve: they were to double the volume of a cubic altar, while preserving its cubic shape. The governors of Delos sent to the geometers of the Academy, imploring them to find the answer and save their city from disaster. In fact, to solve the problem it is necessary to find the cube root of two – and, with the mathematics that the ancient Greeks had at their disposal, this was impossible. So it seems that the advice given by the oracle was – to say the least – mischievous; but the story shows how highly geometry was regarded in ancient Greece.

The word 'geometry' means 'measuring the Earth'. The ancient Greek geometers inherited the knowledge of the ancient Egyptians who, in the third millennium BC, first developed the science of geometry as a practical method of surveying land. Every year, the flooding of the river Nile destroyed all boundary markers within its alluvial plain, and these had to be re-established by central government in order to prevent disputes among landowners. The method of surveying had to be simple and accurate – and it had to enable the measurement of both length and area, which required an easy method of producing a right angle.

The solution adopted by the ancient Egyptians involved two men and a length of rope with 13 knots in it, marking 12 equal divisions. Laid out straight, the rope could be used for measuring distance – and by arranging it in the shape of a triangle, with one side three units long, another four, and another five, a right angle was formed. Using this simple method it was also, of course, easy to lay out rectangles and other more complex geometrical figures – and the method was used, in particular, in laying out the foundations of sacred buildings.

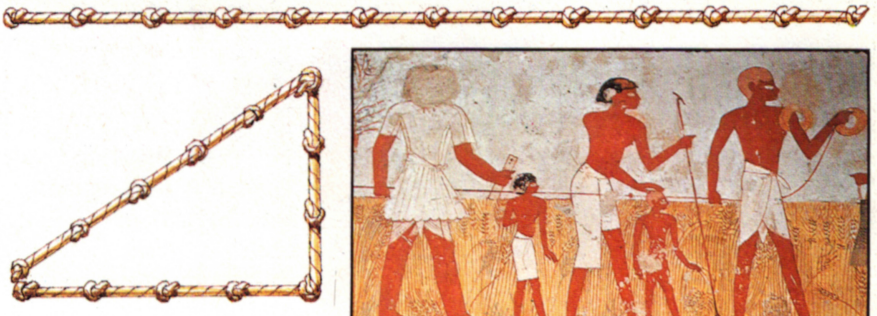
In ancient Egypt organised religion pervaded life to such an extent that almost every

The Greek island of Delos where, 2400 years ago, the people consulted the oracle to discover what steps they should take to escape from the plague that was ravaging their community; the oracle set them a geometrical problem that they found impossible to solve

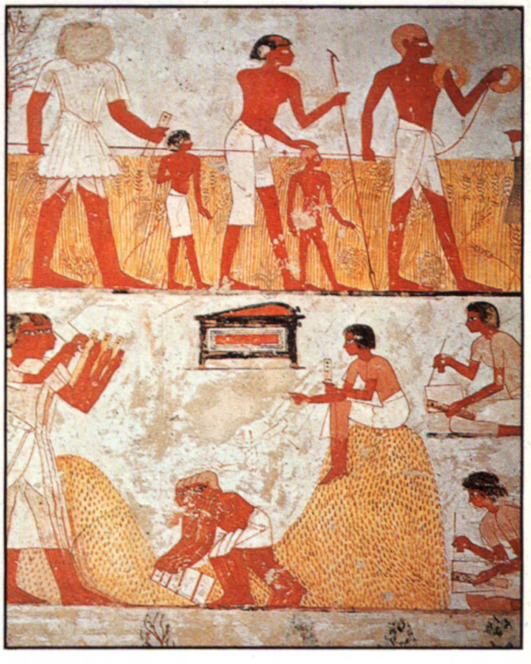
action became a ritual act of worship. The temples and tombs were at the centre of religion, and their laying out was a complex symbolic ceremony. There has been a great deal of speculation about the significance of the dimensions of Egyptian buildings, in particular the pyramids – much of it so fantastic as to be merely amusing (see page 869) – but there is no doubt that every aspect of Egyptian sacred building was infused with religious symbolism. The practice of 'cording the temple' – laying out its foundations – is described in a wall carving at Dandara:

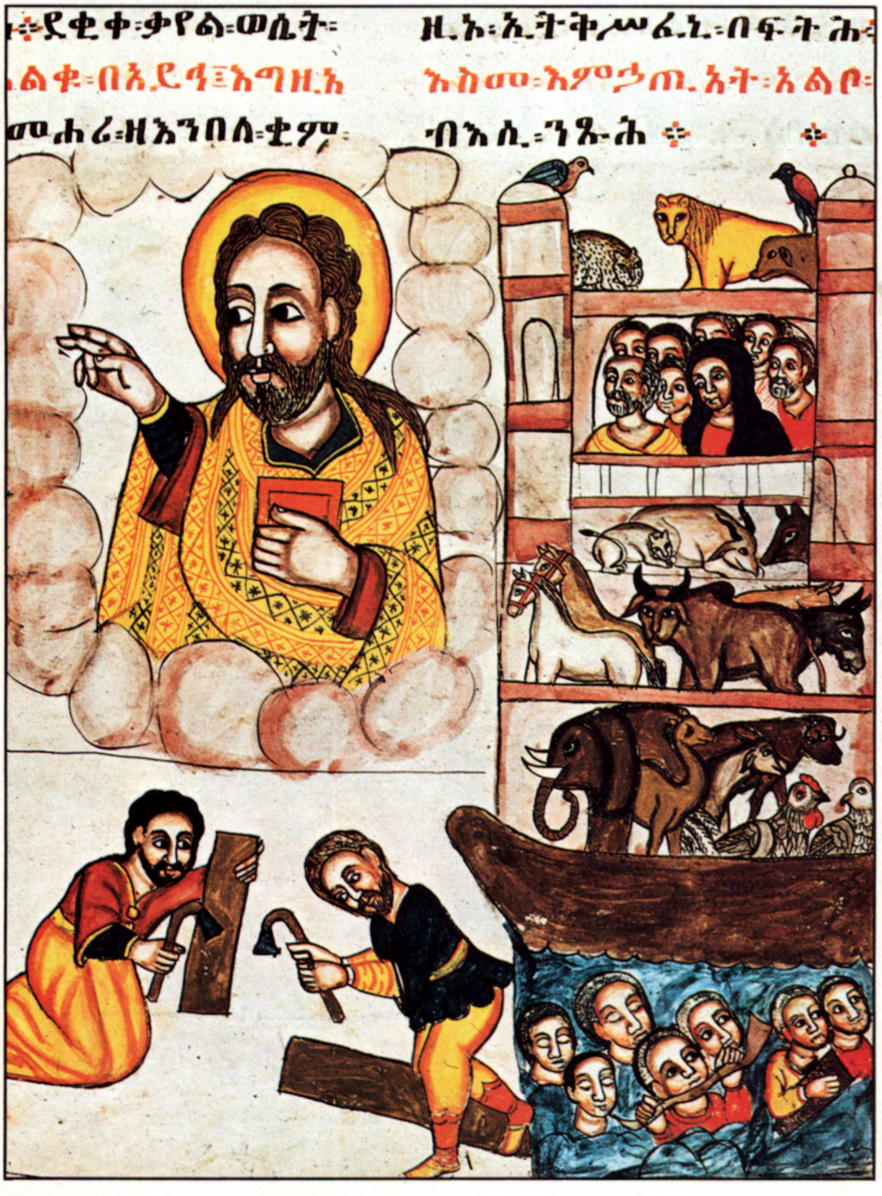
> The living god, the magnificent son of Asti, nourished by the sublime goddess in the temple, the sovereign of the country, stretches out the rope in joy; with his glance towards the *ak* of the Bull's Foreleg constellation, he establishes the temple-house of the mistress at Dandara, as took place there before.

In other words, the priest fixed the orientation of the temple upon the constellation of the Bull's Foreleg – the constellation we now know as *Ursa major*, the Great Bear. The surveyors then fixed a line at right angles to this one, using the knotted rope to form a right-angled triangle – thus imbuing the building from the very beginning with a rich symbolic meaning.



For measuring and surveying, the ancient Egyptians used a rope (above) divided by knots into 12 sections, with which they could form a right angle. The wall painting (right) from the tomb of Menena at Thebes shows such a knotted rope being used to measure the harvest



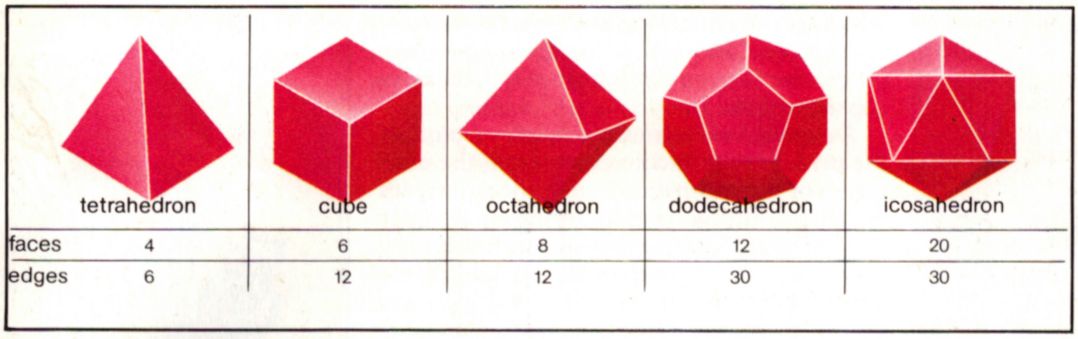


Other cultures chose different ways to enrich their buildings with symbolic meaning. The Tower of Babel, the Babylonian Etemenanki, was designed as a miniature representation of the Universe, with seven stages each representing one of the seven heavens of Babylonian cosmology (see page 1274). Each level was identified with a planet, and painted in a corresponding colour. The bottom layer was painted black to represent Saturn, the next one orange, for Jupiter, the third red, for Mars, the fourth yellow, for the Sun, the fifth and sixth green and blue for Venus and Mercury, and the top white, probably for the Moon.

Symbolic ark

The Old Testament contains many detailed descriptions of buildings obviously designed as physical expressions of the ancient Jewish art of *gematria*, or number symbolism (see page 1326). The dimensions were received by direct revelation from God, and clearly had a transcendent significance. For instance, the instructions for the construction of the ark begin in this way (Genesis 6:14–16):

> And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second and third storeys shalt thou make it.



	tetrahedron	cube	octahedron	dodecahedron	icosahedron
faces	4	6	8	12	20
edges	6	12	12	30	30

The five shapes known as the Platonic solids, in which all edges and interior angles are equal (left, top), were regarded by Plato as the essential forms that acted as links between the spiritual and physical worlds. It seems probable that these five regular solids were known long before the time of Plato: spherical stones carved in the shape of the five solids have been found in Britain dating from Neolithic times (left, from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

Far left: in this drawing from an Ethiopian manuscript Noah's ark is shown with three storeys: according to qabalistic lore each storey was divided into 11 sections, making a total of 33, a sacred number

In the qabalistic tradition Noah's ark is divided into three storeys, each with 11 sections, which gives a total of the sacred number 33. The ark has two openings: the main entrance in the lowest storey, through which the animals pass into the plane of physical life, and the small one-cubit window at the top through which the spirit, in the shape of the dove that Noah sends out to look for land at the height of the Flood, is released. In his book *The canon* (1974), William Stirling goes so far as to connect the dimensions of the ark with the size of the planet Earth and the canons of chronology in Hebrew history. He continues,

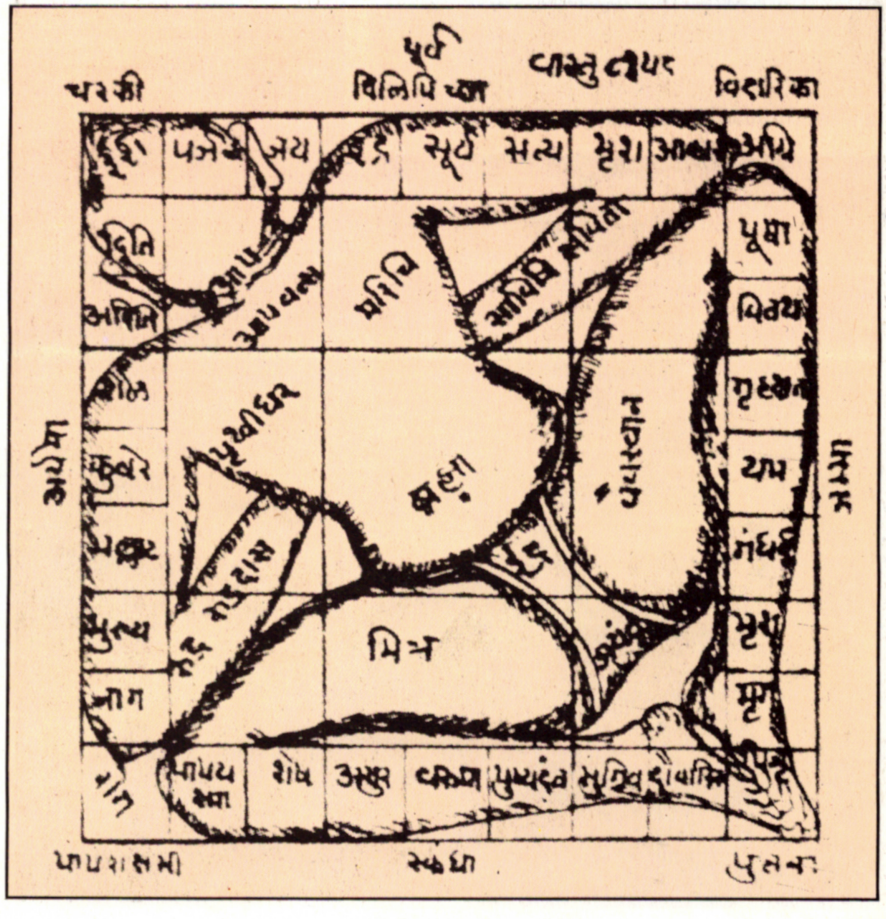
> If this is correct we must conceive, by the proportions of the ark, the vast figure of a man, in the likeness and the image of God, whose body contains the measure of the sun's path in the ecliptic, the circuit of the Earth, and the orbits of the seven planets.

Fanciful as they may seem, such cosmological schemata can be found throughout ancient architecture, particularly in Egypt and Babylonia. The ark is the image of the righteous man who is taken away from an old and evil world and fitted into a new and god-given plan. Those who fit the cosmic scheme survive; those who do not, perish.

For the ancient Greeks, and Plato in particular, it was in geometry that the harmony of the external world was expressed. For them, the world was governed by the proportions given by the two geometric progressions of the Pythagorean lambda: 1, 2, 4, 8 and 1, 3, 9, 27, and their geometrical counterparts. In the *Timaeus* Plato asserted that the forms that best reflected this harmony were cubes and squares whose sides are in these proportions.

But for the philosophical school that arose after Plato the significance of geometry went much further. For Platonists, geometry accounted for all known states of matter. Especially important were the series of Platonic solids, four of which represented the four elements. The tetrahedron, being the simplest regular geometrical solid, represented fire, the lightest of the elements; the octahedron, bounded by eight equilateral

In the Hindu tradition *purusha*, or cosmic man, represents the Universe; and the plan of a Hindu temple can be comprehended as accommodating the cosmic human form (below)



triangles and considered next in lightness to the tetrahedron, was assigned to air. Then came the cube, a solid and immovable figure that stood for the element earth. And the icosahedron, the 'heaviest' of the regular solids bounded by triangles, represented water.

So, at any rate, went the Platonic canon. An extraordinary footnote to the symbolism of the Platonic solids is the find in Britain of a series of spherical stones, at least a thousand years old, carved to represent the same solids. Megalithic monuments seem to indicate a sophisticated astronomical knowledge on the part of their builders; are we to infer that they were also abstract geometers of some standing?

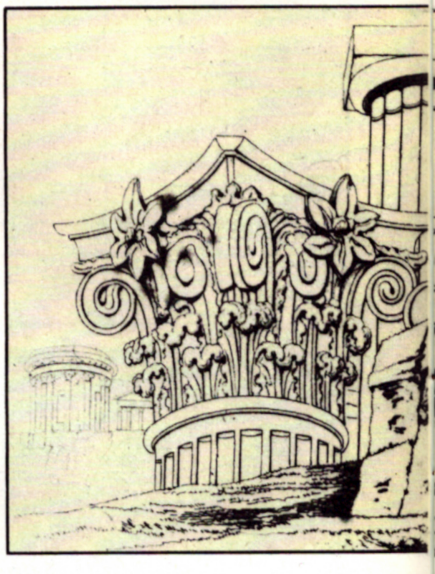
Harmonious Man

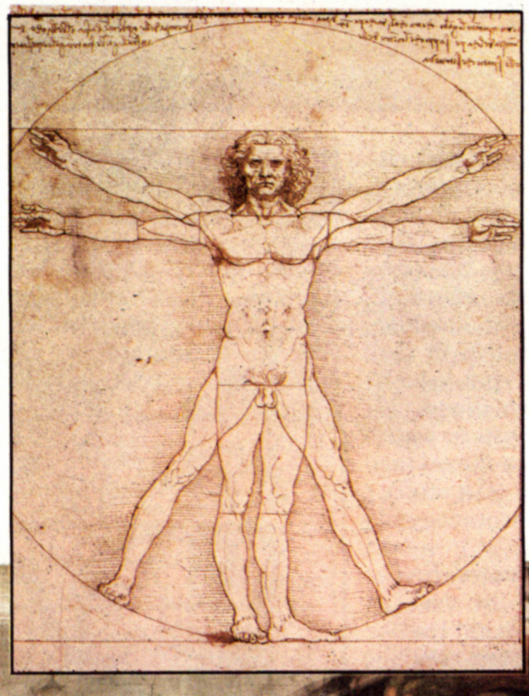
For other civilisations the reflection of divine harmony in the proportions of buildings was a less abstract matter. God made Man – and the proportions of the human body must therefore echo the harmony of the divine plan. A Hindu architectural sutra says 'The Universe is present in the temple by means of proportion' – and the Hindu temple plan is seen as superimposed on the body of the *purusha*, or cosmic man.

In the western tradition the same idea is found in the work of the architectural theoretician Marcus Vitruvius Pollio. More commonly known simply as Vitruvius, this Roman engineer and architect, who worked in the first century BC, codified his rules for good building in his ten books *De architectura* ('Of architecture'). After the fall of the Roman Empire, his books were lost for a millennium until they were rediscovered by the architects of the Renaissance through whom, in their effort to recreate classical architecture, *De architectura* gained a stature far greater than any importance it had had in classical times.

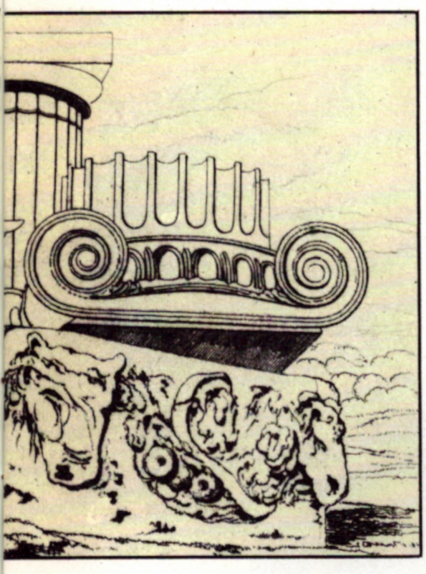
De architectura contains a full account of the principles of architecture, from the education of the architect through the principles of design, the geomantic siting of temples and cities and houses, to painting, machinery and even the martial arts. According to Vitruvius, architecture depends on order, arrangement, eurhythmy – beauty and fitness in the relationship of the parts of the building to the whole – symmetry, propriety and economy.

Eurhythmy is achieved, said Vitruvius, through an elaborate system of proportion. In temples this proportion is to be derived from the proportions of the human body, which, he said, had been 'formed with such





The idea that cosmic harmony was expressed through the human form was take up with enthusiasm by Renaissance designers: Leonardo da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man' (left) is shown fitted into the cosmic circle, and can be divided in half at the genitals and by the golden section at the navel; Michelangelo's painting of the *Creation of Adam* (below), on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, celebrates the beauty of the human body and the essential harmony between God and Man



Above: capitals of columns of the Corinthian, Doric and Ionic orders (left to right). In an influential 10-volume book on architecture, the Roman architect Vitruvius laid down rules for good design – including the correct use of the orders

Right: the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank in Hongkong, shown under construction in 1983. The bank was sited – by its English architect, Norman Foster – to accord with ancient Chinese geomantic principles

propriety that the several members are commensurate with the whole'. No building, he asserted:

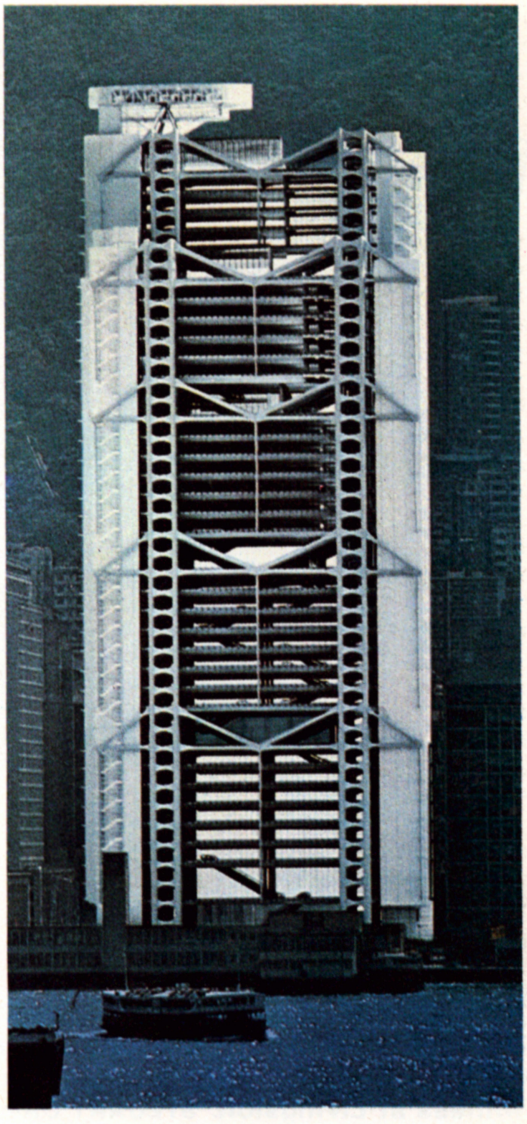
> can possess the attributes of composition in which symmetry and proportion are disregarded [and] unless there exists the perfect conformation of parts which may be observed in a well-formed human being . . .

This foundation of the proportions of architecture on those of the human body was taken up with enthusiasm by the architects of the Renaissance. The proportions were worked out explicitly and in detail, and employed in church façades, in foundations and in paintings. In particular, dimensions were related via geometric and harmonic proportions, and the use of the golden section (see page 1370). In 1525 a Franciscan monk named Francesco di Giorgio published a treatise entitled *De harmonia mundi totius* ('Concerning the harmony of the whole world') that effectively blended the Platonic geometrical tradition, the Christian qabalistic tradition (see page 1326), and Vitruvius's system based on the proportions of the human body.

The quality Vitruvius called propriety was defined by him as that perfection of style that results from the correct construction of a building from canonical principles. It was Vitruvius who recorded the correct rules for building in the classical tradition – rules that allow the symbolism of the buildings to be 'read' in the correct sense. There are, for instance, explicit rules for the use of the various types of classical column – Corinthian, Ionic and Doric – in temples dedicated to the various gods: Doric was to be used for temples in honour of Jupiter, lightning, the heavens, the Sun or Moon, Minerva, Mars or Hercules; Corinthian for Venus, Proserpine, spring water and nymphs; and the Ionic for Juno, Diana, Bacchus and similar gods.

Propriety was also to be achieved by the correct siting of the building. Temples were to be sited in healthy neighbourhoods where suitable springs of fresh water existed, and were to be oriented in such a way that the light could be used to the maximum effect. If this sounds prosaic, it should be remembered that these are among the considerations of good building everywhere and at all times. The ancient Chinese art of geomancy, *feng-shui* (see page 410), was and is concerned precisely with such questions – *feng-shui* means simply 'wind and water'. It is essentially a method of ensuring the propitious siting of buildings in the surrounding physical terrain. To the ancient mind, however, such propitious building was not merely a matter of analysing the physical characteristics of the surrounding countryside. Buildings were also designed to reflect their harmony with Man and the Universe.

The secret language locked into ancient buildings: see page 3041



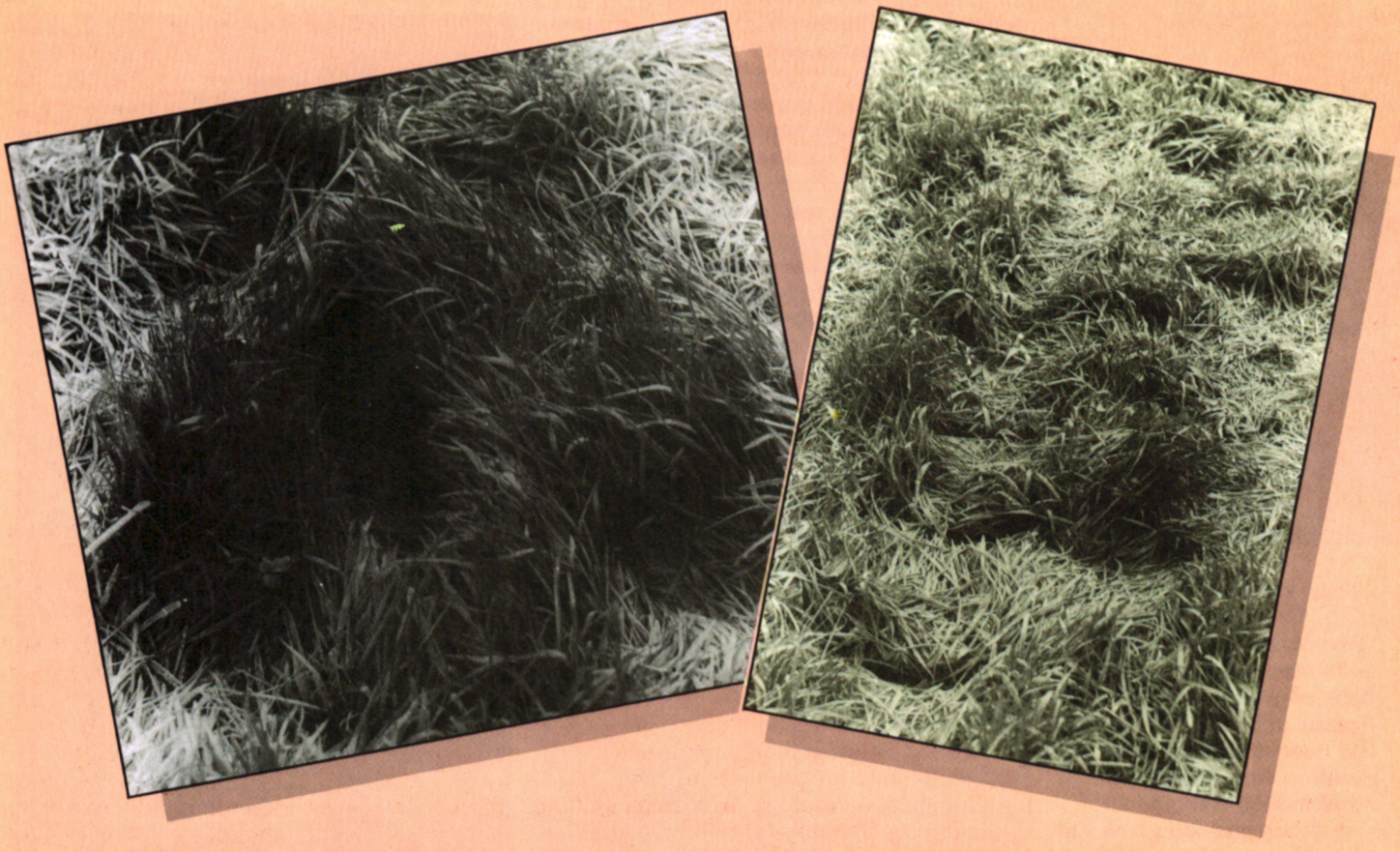
Figures of fun?

In this 16th-century drawing arithmetic is personified as a woman (centre) with the Platonic lambda (geometric progressions) on her skirts

Sacred geometry is an ancient and honourable tradition – but a modern offshoot attempts to attach occult significance to perfectly ordinary mathematics. This is particularly true of the golden section (see page 1370), because of the apparently mysterious way in which it pervades nature. And the fact that the golden ratio φ ('phi') obeys the rule $\varphi^2 = \varphi + 1$, linking the processes of multiplication and addition, has given rise to the following mystical idea:

'If the transformative power of redemption is fixed to the material cross, the cross of addition +, then the moment of resurrection comes when this principle [$\varphi^2 = \varphi + 1$] allows the cross to fall + ×, and an exponential growth occurs, an incomprehensible, non-sequential leap to another level of being.'

Such theories do little to elucidate the real meanings of sacred geometry.



Livingston: the verdict

Unconsciousness, damage to clothing, indentations in the grass – all these were caused by the UFO seen by a lone witness at Livingston. STEUART CAMPBELL sifts through possible explanations and proposes a theory of his own

THE DAY AFTER ROBERT TAYLOR was 'attacked' by mysterious objects in a forest clearing near Livingston, in Scotland, the author was shown to the site of the encounter by police officers. The odd ground marks described by Taylor were visible, although they were not easy to make out among the tufts of coarse grass. The marks were of two types. First there were two isolated parallel 'tracks', each about 8 feet (2.5 metres) long and the same distance apart. Each 'track' was 1 to 1½ inches (2 to 3 centimetres) wide and deep, and about 1 foot (30 centimetres) long. The grass between the indentations was evenly flattened.

Everyone had assumed that the 'tracks' had been made by some heavy object – for example, a caterpillar tractor (presumably endowed with the power of flight, since the 'tracks' began and ended abruptly). But they were a feature of the grass only; the ground beneath was not altered in any evident manner.

Surrounding the 'tracks' were many holes where the earth had been exposed. Each was about 4 inches (10 centimetres) across and the same in depth. They were roughly circular, and nothing about them identified them as having been made by any particular tool. Nor was the earth in the holes compressed. Each hole was angled into the ground at about 30° from the horizontal. All 40 of the holes were mapped by the police. Two distinct rings of holes are evident on their plan, and the direction at which they are angled into the ground changes gradually and consistently around each circle: if one regards one of the rings as circulating clockwise, then the other circulates counterclockwise. The rings are adjacent between the 'tracks', so that the holes are paired.

Physical traces left after the UFO incident at Livingston: disturbances of the earth and grass. There were a number of circular holes (above left), arranged in twin circles. Fresh soil was exposed in each of these holes. The other markings consisted of a pair of ladder-like patterns in which the 'rungs' were short parallel indentations in the grass (above right). The ground beneath was not affected

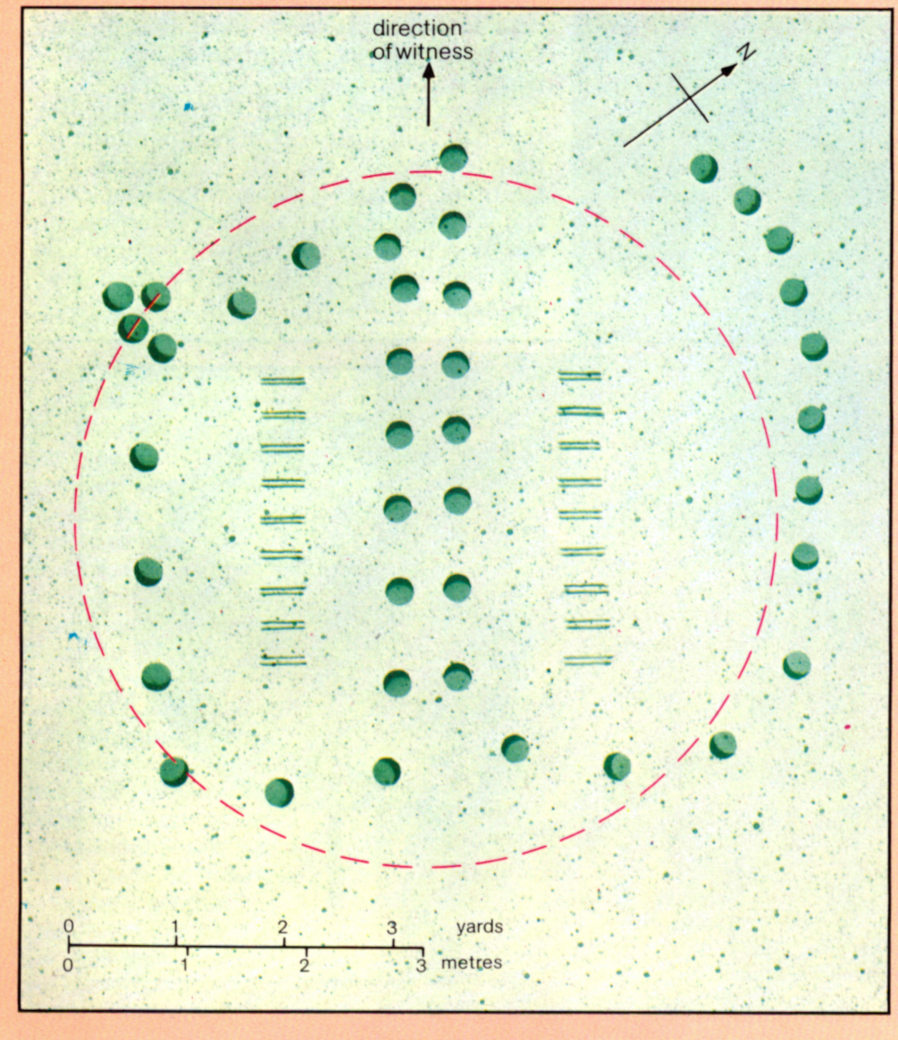
Robert Taylor insisted that no machinery or equipment had lain in the clearing during the previous month, even though some new water mains were being laid only 110 yards (100 metres) away. It did not seem likely that the holes were made with a pick; that would have left some indication in at least one hole. Samples of soil were taken, both from one of the holes and from near by. No significant difference between them was found.

Accurate timing of the morning's events revealed that Taylor must have been unconscious for about 20 minutes. That is a period much greater than would be expected if he had merely fainted, and some more complex

cause must have been responsible. Medical experts have advised the UFO investigators that only two mechanisms present themselves. One is a stroke, but that ought to have left Taylor with either a one-sided weakness or neurological damage. The other possible cause is an epileptic attack. This can explain the length of unconsciousness, which would include a period of sleep after the attack, the loss of control of the vocal cords and limbs (called Todd's paralysis by doctors), the headache and the nausea. It would even explain the pungent smell, for a characteristic of many epileptic attacks is that during the preceding 'aura' – the strange sensations or distortions of perception that precede unconsciousness – the victim has various hallucinatory experiences, and a strong unpleasant smell is very common.

It should be noted that meningitis, from which Robert Taylor had suffered, damages the cerebral cortex and renders its sufferers more prone to epilepsy than would otherwise be the case. An electroencephalograph examination of Taylor showed normal brain behaviour, but that proves very little; epileptics may indeed show normal brain activity between attacks.

It may be concluded that something triggered an isolated epileptic attack. But what was that something?



The ground markings at the encounter site. The circular broken line represents the size and position of the UFO, estimated from Robert Taylor's account. Each of the circular holes slopes into the ground: in the diagram the rim of each hole is shown as a full circle, while the crescent-shaped shading shows the sloping side of the hole. Could a complex pattern of electrical discharges have been responsible for creating these markings?

It is significant that the tears in the forester's trousers were consistent with his story. As already noted, they seemed to have been made by some broad attachment rather than a sharp pointed object, and the 'legs' of the spheres did seem to be broad at the ends. (At least, they were not sharp, like a nail.) Furthermore, if they had remained attached to the clothing after Taylor had collapsed and the spheres had continued moving in the same direction, then they would have been pulling towards his head. A pull in that direction had indeed been responsible for the tears.

What conclusions can we come to about the Livingston encounter?

Robert Taylor has undoubtedly told the truth and he is neither the perpetrator nor the victim of a hoax. The event occurred as he described it and it has no simple explanation.

Some have concluded that the UFO must have been a machine of some kind and that the spheres were robots, which either accidentally or deliberately grabbed Robert's clothing. But it is extremely unlikely that it was a man-made machine. No such device is known to exist; if it does, it must be a closely guarded secret and would hardly be flown publicly in daylight near a busy motorway.

Some are certain that the UFO was an alien spaceship. This raises the usual questions regarding the existence of aliens, whether or not they could reach the Earth, and why they should want to assault elderly Earthmen.

Such questions are unanswerable, and such a theory is far beyond what is necessary to explain the evidence. There is no unequivocal evidence that the UFO was even a machine, let alone a spacecraft. It was not seen in flight, there were no hatches or openings and no 'aliens' were seen.

Black lightning?

There is an alternative explanation, of which the author is the principal proponent. According to this hypothesis the objects were a form of ball lightning (see page 218). The dark colour and protrusions are unusual but by no means unknown in ball lightning. The dark colour of 'black' ball lightning is thought to be caused by atoms of carbon. The protrusions that have occasionally been reported are thought to represent the poles of an octopolar (eight-poled) magnetic field. (The more familiar magnetic field of a bar magnet has two poles.)

The holes in the ground might have been caused by electrical discharges, like miniature lightning strikes. The amount of energy needed to cause the holes can be calculated: it is of the order of 4 gigajoules (1000 kilowatt-hours). The surface of the object causing the discharge would have to be at an electrical potential of about a million volts. The angle of the holes suggests that the discharges occurred at an angle, as they would if the point of discharge were moving rapidly. It is

Dr Colin Farrow with the X-ray fluorescence equipment that he used to analyse soil samples from the forest clearing. Samples were also sent to the Physical Data Section of BUFORA. All these tests failed to reveal any clear evidence of differences between the soil in the holes and that from elsewhere in the clearing

thought by some experts that ball lightning does indeed have a very high potential, and 4 gigajoules is compatible with current estimates of the amount of energy that it could release. The 'tracks' could be evidence of a very powerful magnetic field, also thought to be present in ball lightning, and the two opposed rings in which the holes occurred indicate a solenoidal, or twisted, electromagnetic field guiding the discharge.

According to some theories ball lightning consists of an intense electromagnetic field compressed into a small region. The field ionises the air (breaks down its atoms into electrically charged fragments called ions) and expels the ions, so that a low pressure 'cavity' is formed. Replacement air continually enters the cavity, probably at the poles of the magnetic field. The Livingston case may provide evidence to support this theory. Robert Taylor heard a sucking noise as the 'legs' touched the ground; this suggests that air was being sucked in along the 'legs', which, as suggested above, were probably at the poles of the magnetic field. We can see how two of the 'legs' became attached to the forester's trousers – a strong vacuum is a powerful means of attachment. The two spheres may have been attracted automatically to the man's body because of minute changes in the local magnetic field, but we do not know enough at present to explain their movements in detail.

The damage that led newspapers to talk of an 'attack' by the UFO: a tear in Robert Taylor's trousers. There was a similar one on the other side. They could have been caused by the tug of some kind of blunt-ended object as he lay unconscious

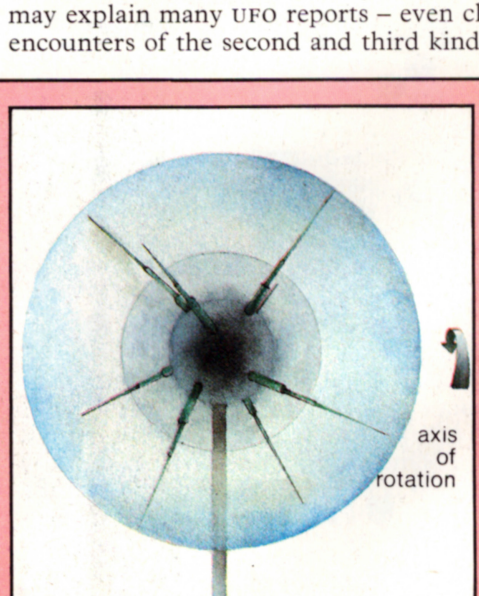
When the two satellite ball lightnings were on each side of him, Taylor was caught between two powerful magnetic fields. Acting together they must have placed a strong field across his brain. Although there is no experimental work to support this idea, it seems probable that such a field could gravely disturb the normal electrical operations of the brain, especially in someone whose brain had been damaged by meningitis. Taylor experienced the unpleasant smell, marking the beginning of what, it was argued above, was an epileptic fit.

The UFO was larger than most ball lightning, but the experts are not agreed on what the maximum size of ball lightning can be. Some put it at 20 to 23 feet (6 to 7 metres). The object's equatorial rim could have been a distortion caused by rotation. The 'stems' rising from the rim may have been magnetic flux tubes connecting the ball lightning to the surrounding magnetic field of the Earth. As yet there is no known explanation for the 'propellers' or the 'portholes' that the witness described. It seems likely that the ball did have a lower hemisphere, but that it penetrated the ground.

There was no thunderstorm in the area that day. But instances of ball lightning on thunder-free days are well documented. Ball lightning is a largely unknown phenomenon and it may have much stranger behaviour on rare occasions than is normally believed. It may explain many UFO reports – even close encounters of the second and third kind.

Changing round

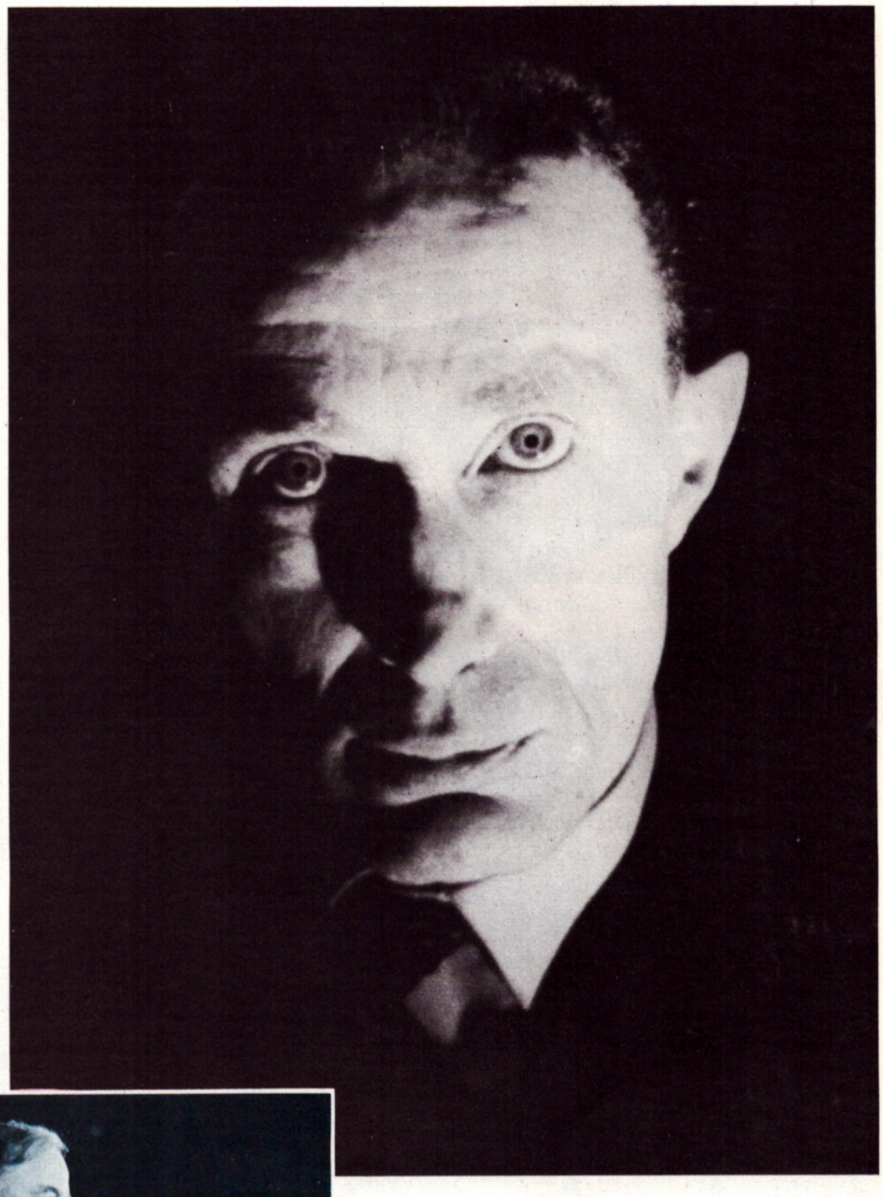
The object seen by Robert Taylor is reminiscent of a UFO witnessed by one Herr Krauss as he walked along a road in Germany. This sphere rolled along beside him for a distance of about 165 yards (150 metres). At one point it lowered a tube with which it apparently drew up water from the roadside. As it did so part of its central portion changed colour, taking on a milky appearance, while the outer part took on a bluish tinge 'like the ionised air to be seen around electrical generators'. Then the tube was withdrawn and the sphere rolled past Krauss into a field and vanished skyward so fast that he could not follow it with his eyes. The object's spokes, though described by the case investigator as 'probably telescopic', suggest the eight poles of a complex magnetic field, which the author believes could account for the Livingston object.



A spherical UFO seen in Germany: spacecraft or electrical phenomenon?

King of deceit

For decades the famous medium William Roy astounded sitters at seances with 'spirit' voices, materialisations – and information that, it was believed, he could have gained only by paranormal means. But, says MELVIN HARRIS, Roy's gifts were more mundane



WHEN WILLIAM ROY DIED in August 1977, *Psychic News* said of him: 'In Spiritualism's long history there has never been a greater villain. He is now in a world where he cannot cheat.' Yet there were many who would not accept that verdict, for over the years Roy had so raised false hopes among his victims that a great many of them could never face the fact that he was a fraud. And the people he duped were not always simple, ill-educated types – far from it. They included prominent society figures, among them the late W. L. Mackenzie King.

Mackenzie King's involvement began during the Second World War when he was Prime Minister of Canada. It was a post that he had held before, but war brought with it extra responsibilities, which included top-secret visits to London to confer with the War Cabinet. And it was on one of these 'hush-hush' visits that he consulted William Roy – then famed as Britain's most outstanding medium.

Because of the nature of his visit to Britain, King thought it wise not to give his true name in advance. So, on the surface, it looked as if Roy had no clue as to the real identity of his client. And yet Roy was able to give the Canadian Prime Minister some convincing messages, and all from those who, in real life, would naturally and easily talk to a head of government. The grandest was Queen Victoria herself. Mackenzie King was thrilled as he chatted away to 'Her Majesty'.

Above right: William Roy, the 'medium' who thrived on publicity, both good and bad. However, his early successes established his reputation among those who wanted to believe he was genuine. For example, during the Second World War W. L. Mackenzie King (right), the Canadian Prime Minister, visited Roy under an assumed name – and was astonished to be given pertinent messages by an assortment of deceased statesmen. Yet Roy later confessed that this was all fraud, based on ingenious detective work that had established the identity of the sitter well in advance of the seance – enabling him to do his 'homework'

More thrills came when Mr Gladstone 'came through' and gave a message of hope – just the kind of thing to cheer one up in the dark days of war. It was all very satisfying and comforting. So much so, that the Prime Minister went back for further sessions and was overwhelmed when his dead brother and sister spoke to him.

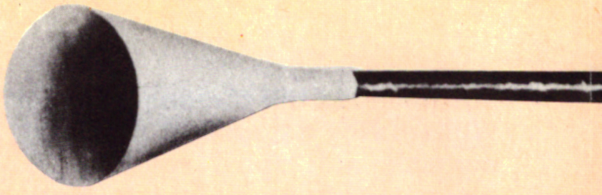
Mackenzie King returned to Canada overjoyed and without any suspicions about Roy whatsoever – completely unaware that he had been thoroughly deceived by a scheming rogue. For Roy's psychic 'gifts' were non-existent. His sessions involved nothing more than play-acting, using fake voices and stage effects, while his 'revelations' or personal messages for the bereaved were, in fact, due to planning and

trickery. So, how did he do it?

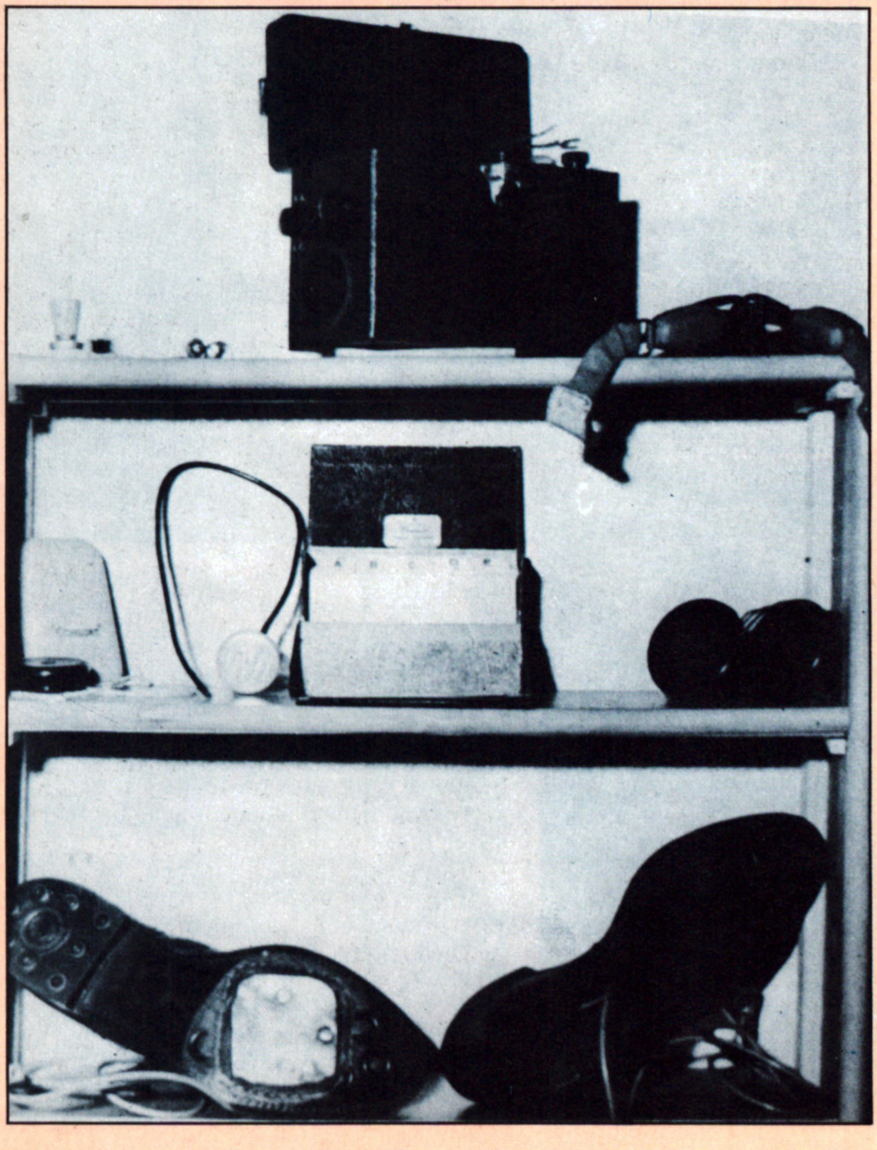
His tricks were usually based on techniques that had been used at the height of the Spiritualist craze in the 19th century. He had added a few of his own but, in the main, he kept to stunts that had been well-tried by other tricksters before him. In fact, he had found most of his tricks carefully explained in a book called *Behind the scenes with the mediums*. This enlightening book was written by David Abbott in 1907 and published in the USA, although a few copies were sold in England by the Magical and Unique Novelty Company of London. Roy had the good fortune to find one of these copies and it set his mind reeling. Here was all the advice he needed to set up a lucrative business. From then on, as far as he was concerned, that book was worth its weight in gold.

By the time Roy set himself up as a medium, he had mastered most of the tricks in the book; he even worked out a few refinements. His clients innocently walked into a trap every time they visited his home: they were expected to leave all coats and bags in a special cloakroom, and this gave Roy's accomplice a chance to search through their belongings for bits of useful information. Moreover, they were kept waiting before each seance began. And as they chatted to pass the time away, hidden microphones picked up their words.

By these means Roy always knew more about his clients than they dreamed possible. Sometimes he would even overhear them name the dead relatives they hoped to contact. In this way, every sitting was neatly rigged beforehand. And when Roy ran out of authentic titbits, he was adroit enough to bluff his way out of trouble – which was partly done by calling on colourful 'spirit guides'. There was one called Joey, another



Below: the equipment used by Roy and his accomplice in their bogus seances. The accomplice collected as much information as he could about the sitters and conveyed this to Roy from the next room by means of a cordless telephone. The connection was made by Roy placing his copper-soled shoes on metal tacks hidden in the carpet, which were wired to cables running through the wall; wires that ran up Roy's trouser-leg (below right) ended in a miniature hearing aid – through which he could hear his accomplice, but the sitters could not



Although the Spiritualist world knew of Roy's fraud as early as 1952, it was not until 1958 that the story made banner headlines in the *Sunday Pictorial* (above left). Curiously, Roy seemed almost to delight in confessing and explaining how he accomplished his bogus effects. He revealed, among other tricks, how he used to make his 'spirit trumpet' fly around the darkened seance room; quite simply it was attached to the end of a telescopic rod, which could be hidden in the hand (above) or extended (top)

called Dr Wilson and, best of the lot, a Red Indian called Tinka. Tinka was not only fashionable – Red Indians being 'in' as spirit guides – he was invaluable, for if the questions became awkward he would just sulk and grunt: 'No can answer. . . . Me just simple Indian' – which would quickly smooth over any tricky parts of the evening.

The microphones and searches of coats and bags were not, however, the only preparations. Once Roy knew the names of his clients he checked on their families at the registry in Somerset House, or looked up death notices and entries in *Who's who*. He even contacted other fake mediums for extra information.

But his most masterly research involved his initial session with Mackenzie King. For in that case he had no opportunity to go through the Prime Minister's pockets and no chance to listen in to his conversation. All he knew in advance was that he was to have a sitting with a 'distinguished person'. And all he knew about the booking was that it was made by a member of the Duke of Connaught's staff. That was little enough to go on, but he had to start somewhere – so he studied everything he could find about the Duke of Connaught. And he discovered that the Duke had been Governor General of Canada from 1911 to 1916. As soon as he read that, Roy made a brilliant deduction – this mysterious visitor could easily be a distinguished *Canadian* friend of the Duke. And the most distinguished Canadian known to embrace Spiritualism was their Prime Minister – Mackenzie King.

Roy was so convinced that his deduction was right that he began practising passages in the voices of Gladstone and Queen Victoria, specifically tailored to King's character. The Queen's high-pitched voice was something of a strain, but by the time Mackenzie King turned up it was good enough to fool him and make him want to know more about the communications.

But Roy was famous for more than the messages he gave – it was the drama with which he delivered them that brought him renown. He could make a luminous trumpet float throught the air in the darkened seance room and induce 'spirit voices' to speak through it. Sometimes, there would even be two voices speaking simultaneously. And, remarkably enough, he could even produce extra voices in full light.

Secrets of the sticking plaster

When he appeared at public meetings, he worked even more baffling stunts. In 1947, at Kingsway Hall, London, his hands were tied to the arms of a chair; his mouth was filled with coloured water and his lips were sealed with sticking plaster – yet he still produced 'spirit' voices. And after the plaster was removed his mouth was found still full of the coloured water – so fakery seemed ruled out. But Roy was responsible for all the voices, even when his mouth was filled and sealed. For him that was just a minor inconvenience. In the darkness it was easy for him to bend his head down and loosen the plaster with one tied hand – then the water was ejected through a rubber tube into a small container in his breast pocket. At the end of the evening the water was sucked back up again, the plaster was smoothed back into place, and everyone was duly overawed at this astonishing display of psychic powers.

The private seances were a different

matter. Most of the voices were produced by Roy but some were provided by his assistant, while others were tape-recordings. In that way Roy was able to produce more than one voice at a time. And the methods he used – apart from the tape-recordings – were all drawn from that invaluable handbook by Abbott.

First, the trumpet flew through the air on the end of a telescopic rod – just as Abbott described. And the assistant in the next room passed information through to Roy by a telephone – again exactly as in the book. Of course, the telephone connection was made without cords, for that would have given the game away. Instead, Roy wore copper plates on the soles of his shoes and these were soldered to thin wires that ran up the legs of his trousers and through his jacket to a small earphone on his wrist. To link up with his assistant, he had only to put his feet onto metal carpet tacks and he was connected – for the tacks were wired up to cables running through the wall.

The system worked beautifully, especially as the earphone could double as a miniature loudspeaker. But it had its limits, so a second connection to the other room was called for; this was provided by a dummy power socket on the wall, which was wired not to the mains but to an amplifier. So Roy could plug a cable into it and energise a miniature loudspeaker fixed on the tip of his telescopic rod. While his assistant's voice came through this speaker, Roy imitated one of his 'guides' and threw in occasional comments in his own voice – small wonder that he was famed for his spellbinding sessions.

Roy's trickery was first exposed in 1952 when he fell out with his assistant – who promptly paid a visit to the offices of *Psychic News*. There he opened a large suitcase and took out the apparatus used to fake the seances. It was all there, from telescopic rod to shoes fitted with copper plates. It looked like the end for Roy.

But there proved to be a problem, for the assistant did not want the matter to go any further. Following this, Roy promised to give up mediumship and leave the country, saying that he wanted to make a new start in South Africa. In fact, he did leave England and the whole sorry affair was silently laid to rest – or so it seemed.

Above: Roy shows how to evade test conditions at a 'direct voice' seance, while one of his 'spirits' proves not to be so convincing seen in a good light (below)

Supreme trickster

However, old habits die hard, and within a few years Roy was organising seances in South Africa. But then he had the supreme cheek to return to Britain and start up again. However, he had gone too far; this proved too much for the rest of the Spiritualist fraternity and one of their papers, *Two Worlds*, finally exposed him as a fraudulent medium.

Dramatic scenes followed this newspaper report. Roy's wife attacked the paper's editor with a riding crop, and Roy himself started a lawsuit against the editor. Roy's wife was fined £3 for the assault and Roy could afford to pay the fine with a smile – for he knew that, in effect, his lawsuit meant that he could go on milking his clients because his action had discouraged any further newspaper comment on the case until after the court hearing. And court actions sometimes take years before they are heard – which is precisely what happened in Roy's case.

He carried on his fakery until February 1958. Then he dropped the lawsuit he knew he could never win and he agreed to pay costs to the editor of *Two Worlds*. Following that he brazenly sold his story to the *Sunday Pictorial*. It was published in five instalments, and readers marvelled at how he had cheated his way to fame and fortune. At the end of the series, Roy wrote: 'I know that even after this confession I could fill the seance rooms again with people who find it a comfort to believe I am genuine.'

At the time that sounded like hot air or bravado, but Roy went on to make his boast come true. He set up shop under the name Bill Silver and for years he ran his old racket without challenge. And, astonishingly, he numbered among his clients people who knew his real identity and who were fully aware of his history of cold-blooded fraud, cynical confessions and publicity seeking.

Was Poe a murderer?

Sixteen months after a young girl was brutally murdered, Edgar Allan Poe published a macabre story that seemed to show inside knowledge of the crime. How did he gain that knowledge? GRAHAM FULLER and IAN KNIGHT report

The murdered girl Mary Rogers (right, drawn by an unknown artist) had worked as a 'cigar-girl' in a tobacconist's store on Broadway in New York. Poe's detective story about the death of Marie Rogêt paralleled Mary's case; Marie Rogêt worked in a perfume shop in Paris (below, in an illustration by Harry Clarke to *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*) before she was murdered

THROUGHOUT THE LATE SUMMER of 1841 the people of New York were held in a thrall of horror and anticipation as the story of a particularly vile murder unfolded in the daily papers. The horror was for the nature of the crime: the body of 21-year-old Mary Cecilia Rogers had been found floating in the shallows of the Hudson river at Castle Point, Hoboken; she had been brutally beaten, raped and strangled. The anticipation was for the killer to be found and brought to justice – but the public was to be disappointed. There was no shortage of suspects; but in each case, either the man under suspicion proved to have a good alibi, or there was insufficient evidence on which to base a charge. One man the police did not interview, however, was Edgar Allan Poe.

In mid 1841 Poe, at the age of 32, was already a respected author and journalist. He had published the chilling stories *Ligeia*, *The fall of the house of Usher* and *The murders in the Rue Morgue*, and was soon to write *The masque of the red death*, *The black cat* and *The pit and the pendulum* – all masterpieces of the macabre that would one day establish Poe as the greatest ever writer of horror stories. At that time he was living in Philadelphia, 83 miles (133 kilometres) from New York; on the face of it, there was no reason at all why the police should have questioned him about the murder at Hoboken. However, 16 months after the murder took place, a new story by Edgar Allan Poe began its three-part serialisation in *Snowden's Ladies' Companion* in November 1842. *The mystery of Marie Rogêt* described, with extraordinary accuracy, the investigation of the murder of a

Below: a lithograph of New York and the Hudson river in the 1840s – the background to the gruesome story of Mary Rogers's murder. Mary's mother kept a boarding house in Nassau Street, where Mary lived

pretty French 'perfume-girl': it was, as Poe deliberately pointed out in his careful annotation, a thinly veiled recreation of the real murder of Mary Rogers, who had worked in a tobacconist's shop. The uncanny part was that Poe seemed to know a great deal more about the 'cigar-girl's' murder than the entire New York and New Jersey police put together. How he came by this special knowledge has been the cause of much speculation: was he there when Mary Rogers was killed? Did he, perhaps, kill her himself?

Sadism and necrophilia

Such an idea is not as far-fetched as it might seem at first sight. Poe's obsession with sadism and necrophilia is well known, as is his fascination with ratiocination (formal reasoning).The investigator in *The mystery of Marie Rogêt* is Poe's French detective character C. Auguste Dupin, a cool, sardonic analyst of crime akin to Sherlock Holmes, who had made his first appearance in *The murders in the Rue Morgue*. Of the Marie Rogêt story, Poe wrote to Dr J. E. Snodgrass in June 1842:

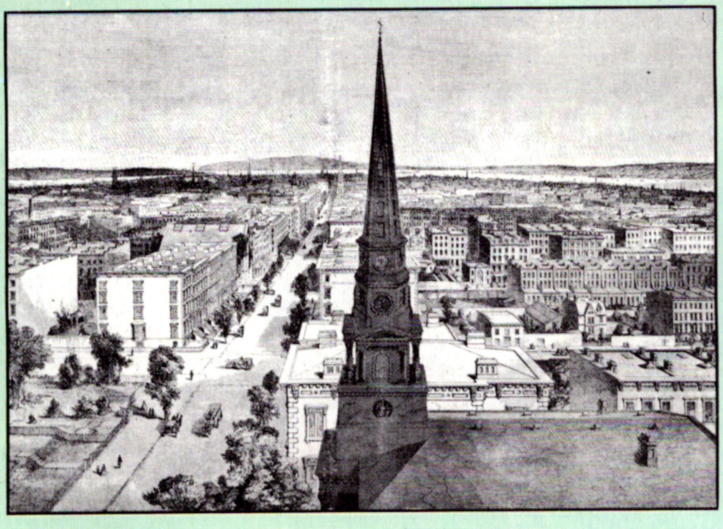
> The story is based upon that of the real murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers, which created so vast an excitement some months ago in New York. I have handled the design in a very singular and entirely *novel* manner. A young *grisette*, one *Marie Rogêt*, had been murdered under precisely similar circumstances with *Mary Rogers*. Thus under pretence of showing how Dupin . . . unravelled the mystery of Marie's assassination, I, in fact, enter into a very rigorous examination of the *real* tragedy in New York. *No* point is omitted. I examine each by each . . . and show (I think satisfactorily) that this subject has never yet been *approached*. The press has been entirely on the wrong scent. In fact, I really believe not only that I have demonstrated the falsity of the idea that the girl was the victim of a gang, but have indicated *the assassin*. My main object, however . . . is the analysis of the *principles of investigation* in cases of like character. Dupin reasons the matter throughout.

This is perhaps more revealing than Poe intended. In 1841 Poe was engaged in a long-standing struggle against insanity; as Phillip Van Doren Stern points out in *The portable Poe* (1977), 'A man who fears the irrational will make a fetish of logic and take comfort in the apparent immutability of the laws of reason.' Obsessional meticulousness is also a characteristic of schizophrenics; and Marie Bonaparte, a disciple of Sigmund Freud, suggests in her psychoanalytical study *The life and works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1949) that Poe was a paranoid schizophrenic.

If we examine the details of the real-life murder, we shall find that Poe's assertion that the girl was the victim of a lone assassin is very curious indeed.

Mary Rogers was the only daughter of a respectable widow who kept a boarding-house for clerks in Nassau Street. Mary had lived there, according to the *New York Herald* of 3 August 1841, 'ever since the house opened, and . . . did all the marketing, and conducted herself with the utmost propriety'. A year or so before her death Mary had gone to work at John Anderson's famous tobacco store on Broadway. There she became something of a local celebrity, and men came to the store specifically to flirt with 'the beautiful cigar-girl' and ask her out. It seems she may also have lodged with Anderson for a while.

Nevertheless various witnesses at her inquest testified to her virtue. Alfred Cromelin, a former boarder at the mother's house, and the first to identify the body, said that Mary (who had disappeared on a Sunday) was 'seldom in the habit of going out on the Sabbath except to church, and then not frequently with young men'. During the whole time Cromelin had known her, she had 'an irreproachable character for chastity and veracity. She was amiable and pleasing, and rather fascinating in her manners.' Cromelin



This engraving of New York in 1859 (right), looking south down Fifth Avenue, shows Brooklyn to the east and New Jersey to the west: Mary said that she had been visiting an aunt in Brooklyn when she first went missing in 1838. But later press reports claimed she had been seen with a tall, dark, well-dressed man; the pair may have looked like the couple on the town (far right), from a contemporary magazine illustration

On Sunday 25 July 1841, the day Mary disappeared for good, she was seen near the Elysian Fields (right, in a print of 1866), a pleasure resort at Hoboken, accompanied by a tall, well-dressed man. Three days later her body was taken from the Hudson river

Far right: the discovery of the body of Marie Rogêt (in an illustration by H. Meyer)

added that she had been 'formerly much attached to a young man in New York, but discarded him'.

So however virtuous she was, it seems that Mary did have boyfriends. In October 1838 she had disappeared from the store and had been missing for a week. When she reappeared, she said that she had been 'tired' and had gone to visit an aunt in Brooklyn.

Reporting on her murder, the *New York Herald* claimed that on that first occasion she had gone missing she had been 'seduced by an officer of the US navy, and kept at Hoboken for two weeks'. During this time, the report said, she had also been seen with a tall, well-dressed man of dark complexion; and on the day she disappeared for good a man answering that description had been seen with her.

A week or so after returning to Anderson's, Mary resigned from the store and went home to live and work with her mother. She subsequently became engaged to Daniel Payne, one of the lodgers.

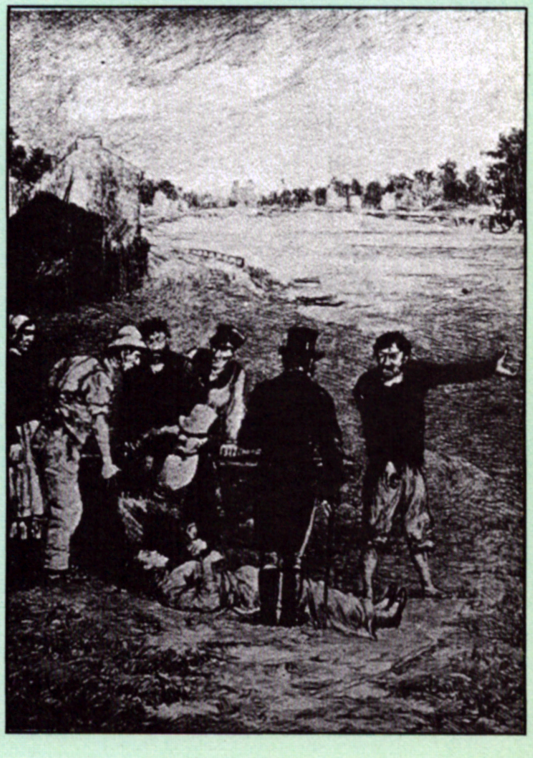
On the fateful Sunday morning, 25 July 1841, Mary knocked on Daniel's door and told him she was going to spend the day with her aunt, Mrs Downing. The careless Payne either forgot or couldn't be bothered to collect his fiancée in the evening as arranged, and it was not until late Monday, when Mary had still not returned home, that it was discovered she had not spent Sunday with Mrs Downing. The police were notified. On the Wednesday two men saw a body floating in the Hudson river, and retrieved the horribly mutilated corpse of Mary Rogers. Her face, throat, shoulders and loins had been so badly battered that she was barely recognisable; round her neck was a piece of lace, torn from her dress, that had been used to strangle her. She had been repeatedly raped.

A prime suspect was Daniel Payne. Early reports suggested that he appeared unmoved by Mary's murder. This may have been because of shock – he committed suicide a few weeks later. Other suspects were William Kucuck, who was a sailor and former lodger of Mary's mother, and Joseph Morse, a wood-engraver.

Kucuck's alibi was not watertight – but nevertheless there was no obvious case against him and he was released. As for Joseph Morse, he said that he had picked up a girl at a fair on the day Mary disappeared and had taken her back to his lodgings where he tried (and failed) to seduce her. A young woman came forward and corroborated his story: it got him off the hook.

The mass of conflicting evidence about Mary Roger's last hours alive was further complicated by a letter sent to the coroner from an anonymous young man; he declared he had seen Mary arrive by boat in Hoboken on the Sunday accompanied by six rough-looking men. She had entered the woods with them willingly, apparently in good spirits ~~and~~ laughing. Then another boat turned up bearing three well-dressed gentlemen. One of them questioned two bystanders about Mary and her companions before following them into the woods. After the letter was published, the two bystanders came forward to confirm this story.

A few weeks later a driver named Adams testified that he had seen Mary arrive at the Bull's Ferry, Hoboken, with a tall, well-dressed gentleman, and go with him to Nick Mullen's, a roadhouse near the Elysian Fields (a Sunday summer resort). The housekeeper there, a Mrs Loss, confirmed this; after the couple had eaten, she said, they left and went into the woods. Later she heard



In *The mystery of Marie Rogêt* Poe maintained, against the evidence of the inquest, that the girl had been killed by a 'lonely assassin'; the murderer had dragged the body to the river, Poe said, using a piece of cloth torn from the victim's clothing and secured round her neck (right, in an illustration by Frederick Simpson Coburn). Afterwards (below right, by the same artist) the murderer made his escape by river, tying up eventually at 'some obscure wharf'

a scream. Two watchmen said they had heard a 'moaning' in the woods at much the same time. On 25 September Mary's petticoat, silk scarf, parasol and handkerchief were found in a thicket by Mrs Loss's children.

The most significant medical finding by the coroner was that Mary had been 'brutally violated by five or six men'.

What did Edgar Allan Poe – in the guise of his detective Dupin – make of all this? Sifting the evidence, item by item, he made a number of startling deductions that went far beyond the police findings. His conclusions are amazing – but could easily have been produced to fit what Poe believed (or knew) was the manner of Mary's death.

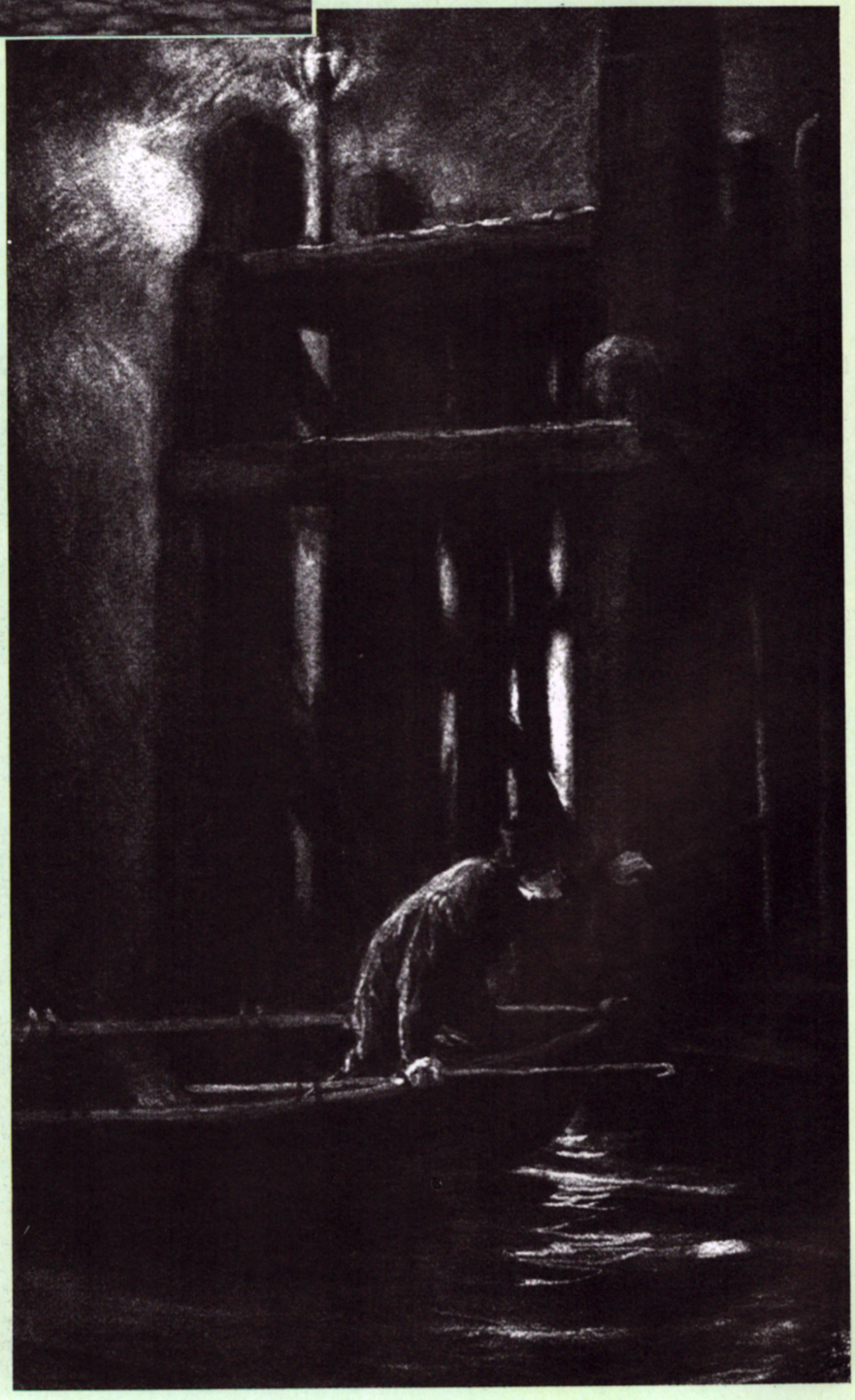
Lonely assassin

To take just one instance, Poe believed, despite the coroner's finding of gang-rape and murder, that Mary was the victim of a 'lonely assassin'. To support this theory he cited the evidence of a struggle at the scene of the crime in the woods. A gang of men, he suggested, would have easily overpowered a single defenceless girl without leaving any signs of a struggle. The fact that traces of a struggle were evident suggests rather that Mary put up a spirited defence against a single assailant.

To Poe's mind, the fact that articles of Mary's clothing were left behind also suggested a single killer, since a gang would have had enough hands available to remove the body and gather up all scraps of evidence. Poe also deduced that the strips of fabric torn from Mary's clothing were used to make a 'handle' so that the killer could drag her body to the river; also the fact that the body was obviously dragged along the ground suggested a lone killer, since a gang would have had no difficulty in carrying it. These tenuous deductions seem to smack either of literary licence or, perhaps, of inside knowledge of the crime.

In pursuit of the 'one-man' theory, Poe appeared to be leading up to denouncing the 'naval officer' Mary had eloped with on the first occasion she had disappeared. This man, he says, was 'dark and swarthy'. Is this perhaps the tall, well-dressed man of dark complexion Mary was seen with on the occasion of her first disappearance and on the day she died?

We have two contemporary accounts of Poe's own physical appearance. According to Mary Devereaux, he was about 5 feet 8 inches (1.73 metres) tall, had dark, almost black hair, and his skin was a 'beautiful olive'. He was very slender, with an erect military carriage, and always wore a black frockcoat buttoned up, with a black cravat, and had an air of elegance. J. H. B. Latrobe agreed that although he was below middle size he carried himself erect, and 'could not



be described as a small man'. He habitually dressed all in black, and 'Gentleman was written all over him.'

Just when Poe appears to be on the point of naming the assassin, *The mystery of Marie Rogêt* is interrupted with the following editorial note:

> For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS placed in our hands, such portion as details the *following up* of the apparently slight clue obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass. . . .

This infuriating literary device leaves the mystery unanswered. Did Poe feel he was entering dangerous ground – perhaps even the depths of his own deranged psyche? In a letter to a friend who had asked about the omitted parts of the manuscript Poe wrote:

> Nothing was omitted in 'Marie Rogêt' but what I omitted myself – all that is mystification. . . . The 'naval officer' who committed the murder . . . *confessed* it; and the whole matter is now well understood.

In the later stages of the police investigation it was suggested that Mary might have died of an attempted abortion. According to one literary critic, Poe was caught out by the abortion rumour and had to change his ending; he also made 15 other small changes to accommodate the possibility of an abortion death.

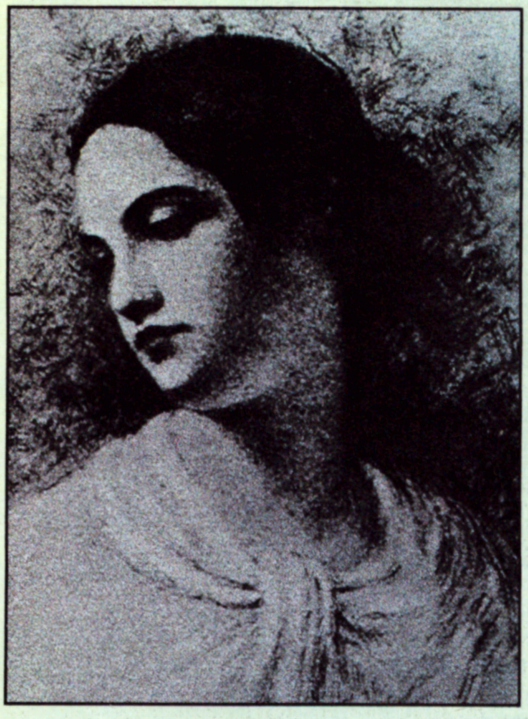
It is clear from the Marie Rogêt story that Poe had an obsessive interest in the death of Mary Rogers, and a desire to recreate the crime in all its lurid detail. He was also notorious for his drunken disappearances, nocturnal ramblings, lowlife pursuits and dalliances with shopgirls and actresses. He was a frequent visitor to New York, and, according to one report, it now seems he may have paused at Anderson's shop on 3 October 1838 to flirt with the 'cigar-girl'; possibly her subsequent impromptu holiday was spent in the writer's company.

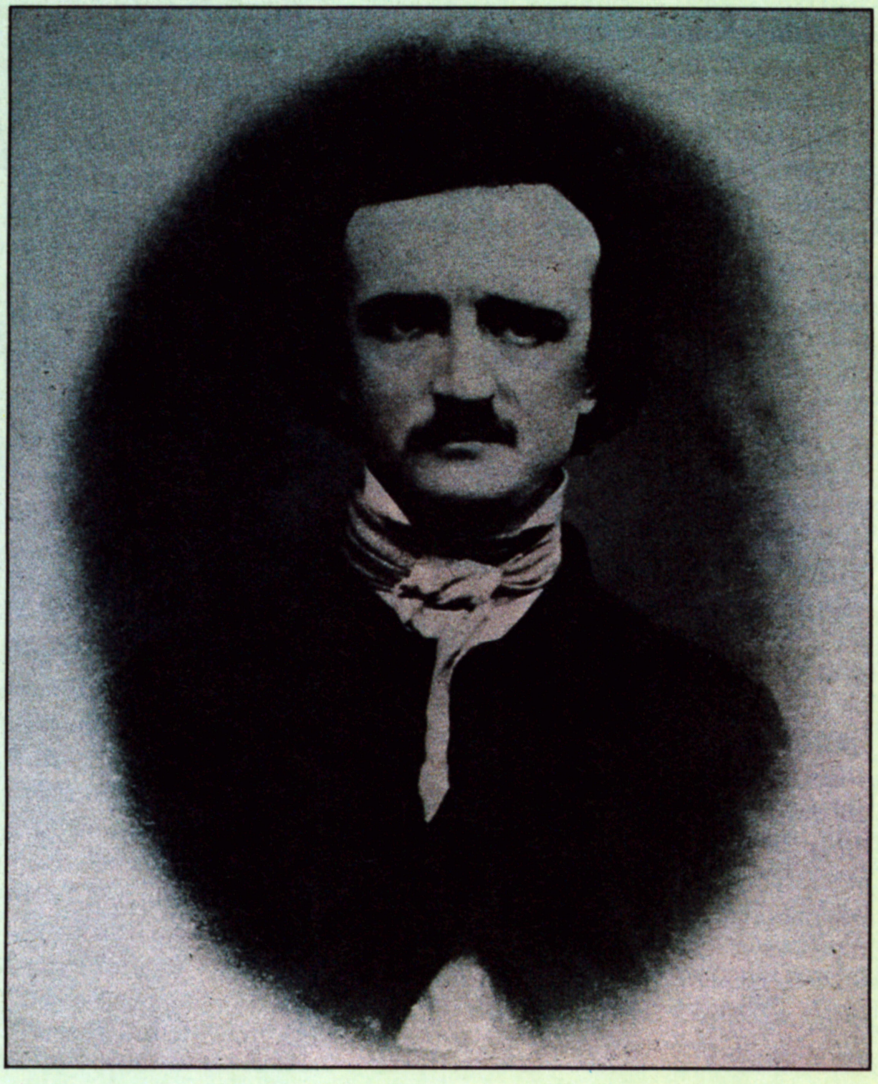
Further reading

Marie Bonaparte, *The life and works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Hogarth 1949
Philip Lindsay, *The haunted man*, Hutchinson 1953
Julian Symons, *The tell-tale heart*, Faber 1978

Alcoholic blackouts

During that summer of 1841 Poe's young wife, Virginia, was seriously ill with consumption, and he must have been under great stress. Certainly by the following summer, when she was dying, he was often in an alcoholic stupor and, according to Marie Bonaparte, sought refuge 'in flight to the woods'. Of this period in his life Poe wrote later: 'I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank, God only knows how often or how much.' Is it too fanciful to speculate that during July 1841, in one such 'fit of absolute unconsciousness', he may have gone wandering in the woods at Hoboken, or even that Mary made an assignation to meet him there? And was the ghoulish *Mystery of Marie Rogêt* prompted by a murderer's desire to boast of his crime?





Edgar Allan Poe (below, in a daguerreotype of 1848) and his beautiful young wife Virginia (below left, in an etching by S. G. Learned); Virginia was seriously ill with tuberculosis in 1841, when the murder took place. Poe was rumoured to be fond of low life and dalliance with shopgirls; he always wore a black frockcoat, buttoned up, and 'had an air of elegance'. Was it possible that he was the 'dark, well-dressed man' seen with Mary Rogers just before her death?

'The unaccountable one'

Few psychics have been as renowned for their worldly achievements in the arts and sciences as Emanuel Swedenborg. But he became increasingly famous for his odd ability to live in both this world and the next. DAVID CHRISTIE-MURRAY reports

OF THE RARE BREED of encyclopedic intellects who excel in every branch of knowledge they study, surely the Swede Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was the strangest. He was, for example, a scientist highly skilled in anatomy, chemistry, mathematics and physics. He was also a psychologist and psychoanalyst, theologian, fluent in nine languages, a competent craftsman in seven arts, and the inventor of at least 11 contrivances that lacked only 20th-century technology to perfect them. He was a metallurgist and mining engineer, and prolific author of works that were translated into 30 languages. And not only was he a gardener, musician and poet, he was also a psychic of high quality and the inspiration for a new Christian denomination.

His career as a scientist, however, came to an abrupt end in 1745 when he received a vocational 'call' to become a theologian. As the former he had been a pioneer – anticipating, for instance, by inductive methods, some findings of modern nuclear physics – and his theories about the workings of the brain have been confirmed by modern technology. Yet long before 1745 he had shown a marked interest in religious matters and had had mystical experiences that were harbingers of his future course. Swedenborg did not consider himself eccentric in looking for the seat of the soul in the 'spiritous fluid' that he believed to be the essence of blood – and he seems always to have been aware of the existence of his guardian angel.

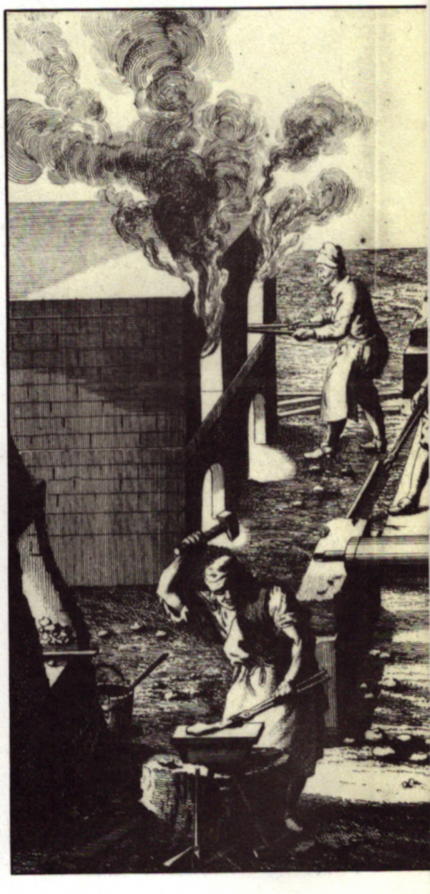
His first recorded psychical/spiritual experience occurred in 1736. A state of profound meditation led to a lengthy 'swoon' that 'cleared his brain', giving him great powers of mental penetration – a process that was repeated at least once in his lifetime.

In the same year he began to record his dreams. Again he anticipated modern ideas of dream symbolism, seeing a relationship between natural objects appearing in dreams and their counterparts on another plane. Light represented intelligence, heaps of rags gross thoughts, and soldiers marching past his window protection from harm. This was the beginning of his 'science of correspondences', which was related to poetic imagery but transcended it. An unpublished dream journal for the year 1744 depicts the struggle between Swedenborg's dependence on scientific methods and his growing interest in spiritual conceptions.

In April 1744, his first psychic crisis occurred. In bed, Swedenborg heard a noise as of many winds, was seized with trembling from head to foot, was shaken and flung on his face by an unseen power, felt a hand pressing his own – which were clasped in prayer – and beheld Jesus, with whom he talked for a short while.

A year later came his most important crisis. One day, after his typically indulgent midday meal, the room suddenly darkened, and the horrified Swedenborg saw the floor crawling with snakes and frogs. A man suddenly appeared in the corner, startling him by calling, 'Eat not so much!' Thereafter Swedenborg's life became very much more abstemious. That night the man reappeared, saying he was the Lord God who had chosen Swedenborg to declare to mankind the spiritual content of the Scriptures – which he would reveal to him in due course. That same night the world of spirits, and heaven and hell, were opened to Swedenborg. From then on he forsook the writing of worldly literature to deal only with spiritual matters.

From 1744 onwards he produced a stream of theological works culminating in 1771 in



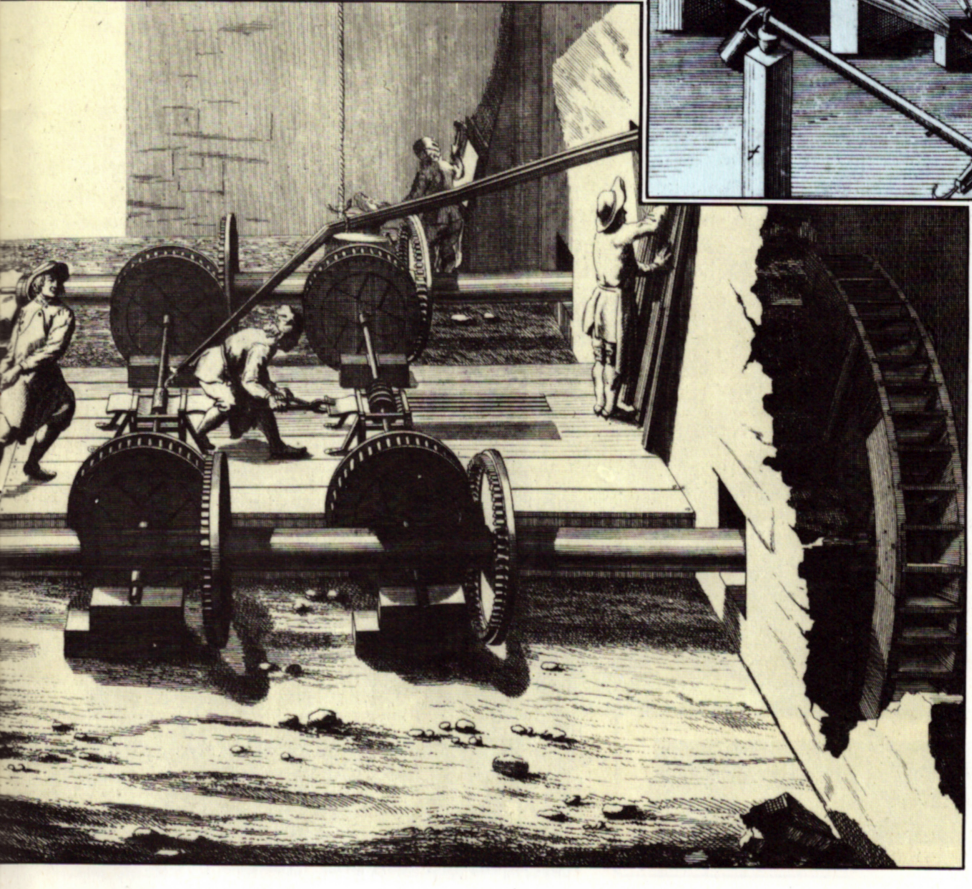
his great systematised theology *True Christian religion*. And from 1745 he claimed to be able to live simultaneously in this world and the world of spirits. His first awareness of spirits was 'by a sensation of obscure sight' and a consciousness of being surrounded by them. Later, he seems to have seen and chatted with them at will as easily and naturally as with living people, and learned at first hand the conditions of the afterlife. The spirits themselves called him 'the unaccountable one', because he was the only human able to live at once in both worlds. He was a unique medium; it was not the spirits who entered his world, but he who entered theirs.

He developed a variety of psychic gifts, including precognition and prophecy. He predicted the death of a certain Olofsohn at 4.45 p.m. the following day, and, on a journey, that his ship would arrive at Stockholm, 'this day week at 2 o'clock' – an incredibly short time for the voyage; both these prophecies were fulfilled to the minute. He also developed as an automatic writer and 'direct voice' medium, taking dictation from spirits, although he destroyed his scripts because his mission was 'only to tell such things as flowed from God Messiah mediately [in due course] and immediately'. His powers of clairvoyance became legendary: he told a mill-owner with whom he was having dinner that he should go at once to his mill, where the man found that a large piece of cloth had fallen near a furnace and caught fire; on another occasion he told a certain Dr Rosen, who had denied owning a particular book, its exact position on a shelf in Rosen's attic – where the mystic had never been.

On Saturday, 19 July 1759, Swedenborg was one of 16 guests of William Castel at his home in Göteborg, 240 miles (385 kilometres) from Stockholm. At 6 p.m. he left the company for a time, returning pale and greatly agitated. He announced that he 'knew' clairvoyantly that a great fire was raging in Stockholm, that a friend's house had been destroyed and that his own was threatened. Two hours later he reported that the fire had been extinguished three doors from his home.

The following day, Swedenborg told the provisional governor how the fire had started, how long it had lasted and how it had been quenched. A messenger from Stockholm arrived on Monday evening and a royal courier on Tuesday – both confirmed Swedenborg's account in full.

Left: Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), the great Swedish philosopher and theologian, whose many talents included devising new ways of using metal in engineering works (below and bottom) as well as a host of inventions and discoveries that showed him to have one of the most enquiring and incisive of minds of post-Renaissance times. His gifts were not entirely academic, however, for he was also one of the most convinced – and convincing – psychics on record



In 1760, M. de Marteville, Dutch ambassador to Stockholm, died. A year later, a goldsmith sent his widow a bill for a silver service he had sold the ambassador. Convinced that the payment had already been made, Madame de Marteville requested Swedenborg to ask her dead husband about it. This he did a few days later, when he met the ambassador in the spirit world. The latter promised Swedenborg that 'he would go home that same evening and look after it.' Eight days after Madame de Marteville's interview with Swedenborg, her husband told her in a dream where the receipt lay, behind the drawer of his desk where it had been pushed, probably accidentally.

Another famous incident occurred in October 1761. Augustus William of Prussia, brother of the Queen of Sweden, died in 1758, and the Queen, informed of Swedenborg's gifts, summoned him and asked him to undertake a mission to her dead brother. Three weeks later, the seer asked for

a private audience with the Queen, whom he found playing cards. They retired into an apartment where Swedenborg told Her Majesty something confidential, which he had sworn to keep private from everyone else. The Queen turned pale, tottered as if about to faint, and exclaimed, 'That is something which no one else could have told, except my brother!' When she emerged from her interview with Swedenborg, she was noticeably shaken.

An absent-minded guest

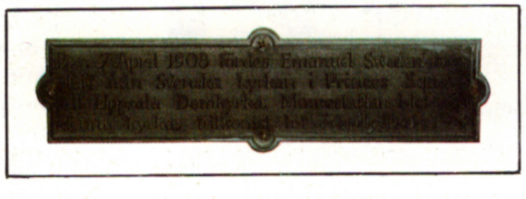
On 17 July 1762, when Tsar Peter III of Russia was strangled in prison by conspirators, Swedenborg was at a party. A fellow guest noticed that in the middle of the conversation Swedenborg's expression changed and it was evident that 'his soul was no longer present in him and that something strange was taking place.' When Swedenborg came to himself, he described the Tsar's death at that very hour and urged the company to make notes of his pronouncements so that they might compare them with the announcement of the death in the papers.

Swedenborg believed that heaven and hell are all around us, and that dying is simply the process by which our soul changes its state. The spirit newly arrived in the next world is received by angels and good spirits but, by a kind of spiritual gravitation, is drawn into association by inner similarities with those with whom it wishes to be, pursuing its own delights and ambitions and a life similar to its career in the body. God punishes no one, although evil lusts may be burned away and the damned tortured – yet only in the sense that they are restrained from doing the evil they crave. Every inhabitant of the three heavens and three hells that make up Swedenborg's spiritual cosmology, including angels and devils, was once a human being, for mankind inhabits innumerable planets besides our own. Kindred spirits in the hereafter can marry. There is no reincarnation.

What is to be made of a man with such convictions and eccentric claims? Contemporaries who knew him found him sane, sensible, of unimpeachable honesty, kind, generous, always agreeable, efficient in any work he undertook – but somewhat reserved. Jilted in his youth, he remained single, though attracted by women, and this has led to the suggestion that his experiences were due to frustrated sexuality. Their genuineness has also been questioned by some modern critics and, as with so many past events, one cannot be certain that they actually happened as recorded. All one can say is that many contemporaries who knew him well accepted him and them as genuine.

Above right: the Swedenborg Society headquarters in Bloomsbury, London, house a comprehensive library of Swedenborg's works, besides holding regular lectures on his extraordinary range of theories and beliefs pertaining to both this world and the next

Right: memorial plaques to Swedenborg in the Swedish church in central London. In 1908 Swedenborg's body was removed from London to Uppsala at the request of the Swedish government



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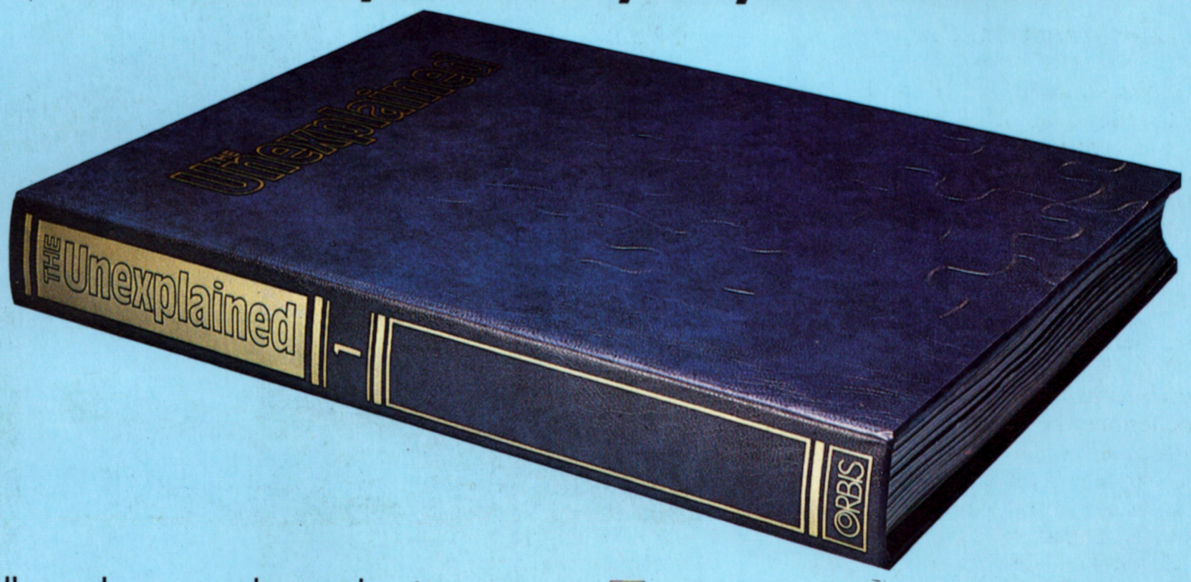

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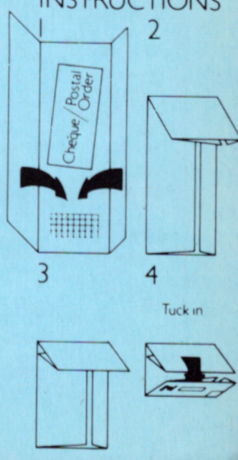

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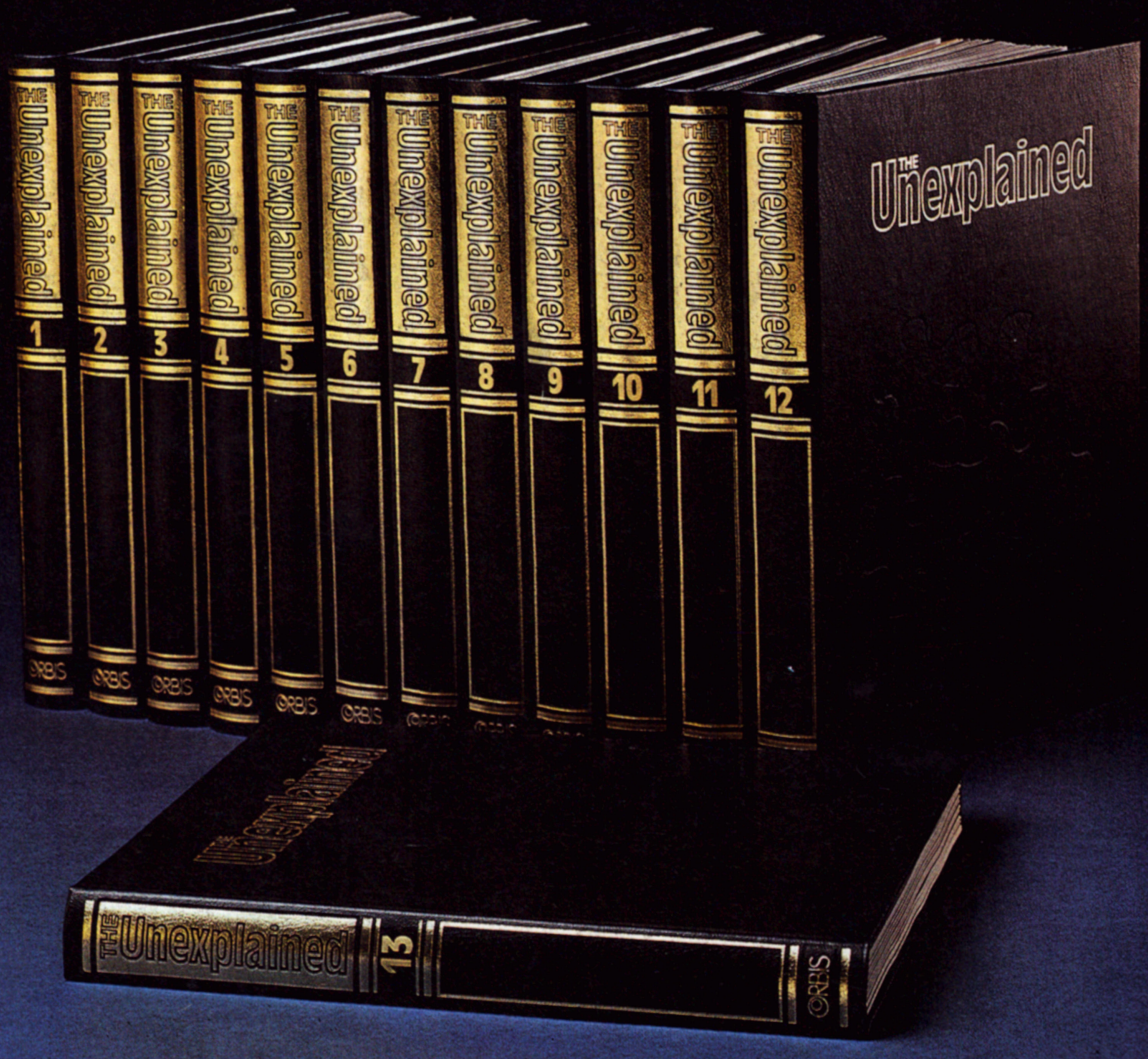

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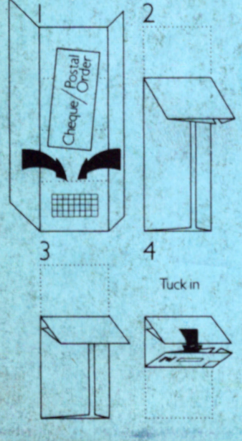

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